

S E R M O N S,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. PAUL,

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA.

CHIEFLY DURING THE YEAR 1845.

SECOND SERIES.

BY

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CURATE OF ST. PAUL'S,

AND CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF NOVA SCOTIA.

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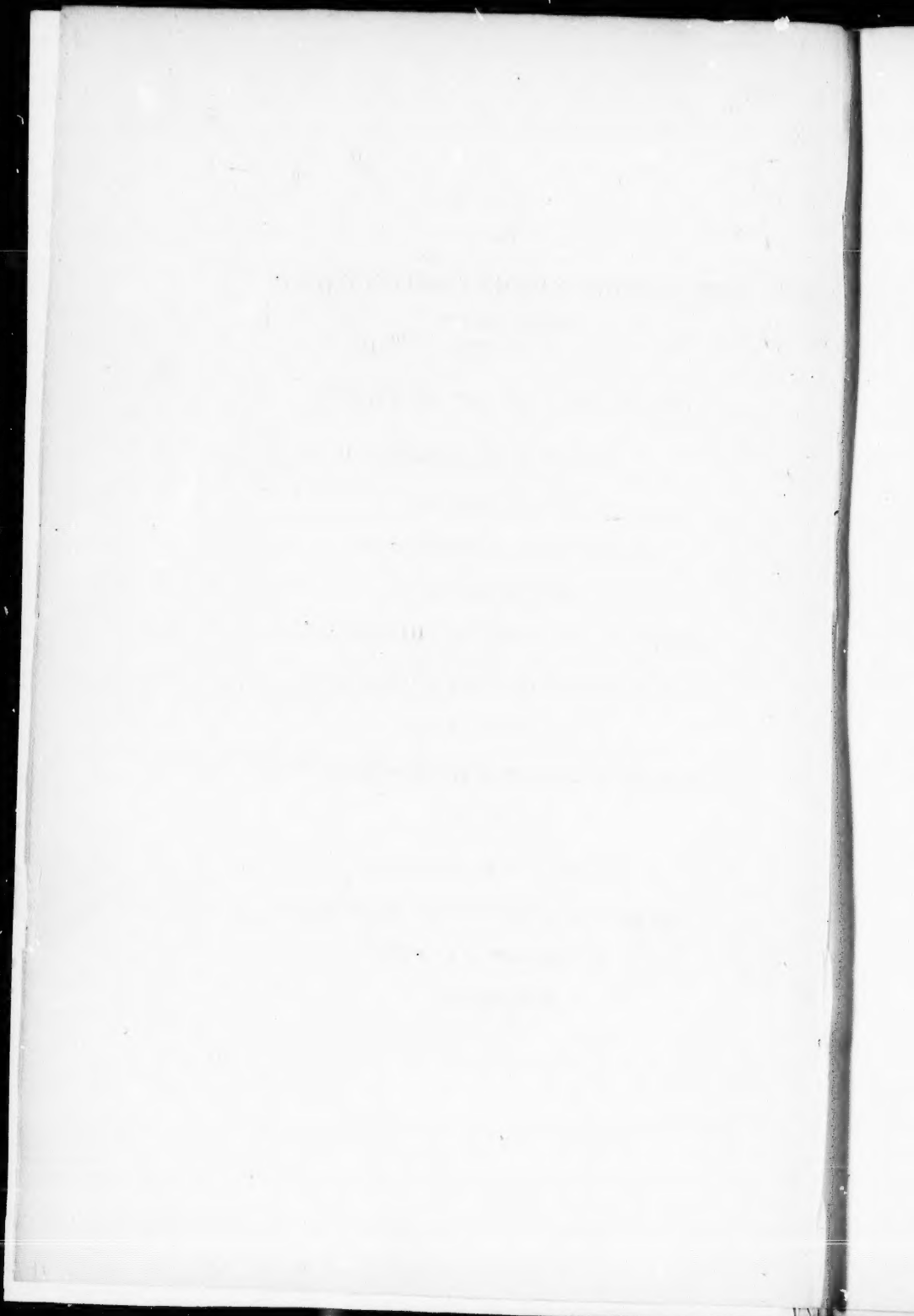
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TO
SIR CULLING EARDLEY SMITH, BART.,

OF BEDWELL PARK, HERTS,
ETC., ETC., ETC..

THIS VOLUME OF SERMONS

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE
OF MANY ACTS OF CHRISTIAN KINDNESS
AND BROTHERLY LOVE
MANIFESTED TO THE AUTHOR, FOR HIS MASTER'S SAKE,
WHEN HE WAS "SICK" AND A "STRANGER"
IN A STRANGE LAND;
AND WHICH, HE TRUSTS, WILL BE REMEMBERED BY HIM
WHO HAS SAID,
"INASMUCH AS YE HAVE DONE IT
UNTO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE, MY BRETHREN,
YE HAVE DONE IT UNTO ME,"
MATT. XXV. 40.



PREFACE.

THE declining state of the Author's health obliging him to relinquish the task he had fondly hoped to complete, of preparing this volume for the press, the Sermons, xvi. to xxv., have been entrusted to the revision of a friend, whose corrections, however, have been strictly limited to verbal alterations.

The Lord prosper this—it may be the last—attempt of His servant “to testify of THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD;” and may every reader find the same consolation in its blessed and soul-sustaining truths as the Author has experienced on his “bed of languishing!”

E. M.

WIMBLEDON,
June, 1847.



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SERMON I.

GOD LEADING THE BLIND.

ISAIAH XLII. 16.

*I will bring the blind by the way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.**

THE principle of the Lord's dealings with His creatures appears to be the same in every dispensation, in every age. At one time, as well as at another, may the Lord thus appeal to His fallen creatures: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."†

* Preached on the first Sunday of the year.

† Isa. lv. 8, 9.

And this resemblance between the Lord's dealings at one time and at another may be traced, not only in the wisdom that guides, and the holiness that pervades, but also in the mystery that envelops them. He ordereth all things wisely, and doeth all things well; but "clouds and darkness are often round about His throne."* "His path is in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known."†

And the mystery which thus envelops many of the Lord's dealings with His creatures, and hides *the reason* of His dispensations from our view, even when the presence of His hand is plain enough, seems peculiarly to screen the future from our curious gaze. The events that come, and the reasons that shall prompt them, and the object they shall have in view, and the purpose they shall answer;—who can pretend to spread these out before us, and declare to us the counsel of the Most High?

And yet it is our privilege, as rational and immortal beings, to look forward. As much as it is our duty, as responsible beings, to look upon the past, to trace the dealings of the Lord's hand in all that has befallen us, and to examine the improvement we have made of the various dispensations, by which He has appealed to us; so is it our privilege and our duty to

* Ps. xevii. 2.

† Ps. lxxvii. 19.

look onward,—to anticipate in some measure the events that may befall us, to apply the lessons of our past experience to the guidance of the future, and to seek unceasingly the grace, which may prepare us, day by day, for whatever the day may bring forth. Although, in wisdom and in love, the particular trials, through which each one of us may be called to pass, and the particular dispensations by which God's dealings with us may be marked, are hidden from our view, yet the leading feature of the events that are coming on may be anticipated, and the necessity felt and acted upon, of seeing the Lord's hand in everything that cometh, and aiming to profit by His dealings with our souls.

And such appear to be our duty and our privilege at the present season. Placed, as we are, in the good providence of God, at the commencement of another year, it is our wisdom to consider what it may have in store for us. Taught, by the experience of the past, the uncertainty and vanity of all earthly things, and assured, that in this respect the future will be like the past, who that is wise can set out upon another year, resolved to live as much as ever to the things of this passing scene? Knowing how wonderfully, in past times, the Lord has overruled all things for the good of those that put their trust in Him, and assured

that His wisdom and His love are just as much engaged for the future good and blessing of His people, who that is wise would not desire to place himself in the Lord's hands, and to commit the keeping of his body and his soul to Him. Here then, beloved, I would urge you to pause awhile, as it were, upon the threshold of another year, and on this its first Sabbath day, to consider what the Lord may have in store for you during its coming seasons. Stand here, as it were, upon your watchtower, and look out upon the plain that stretches out before you; and watch, to see what the Lord shall say unto you, and what answer ye shall give, what improvement ye shall make, under the circumstances of the year that cometh.

For your guidance in this important new-year's work, I would suggest the words of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah, which I have selected as my text. In their primary meaning, they appear to have been intended to comfort the Jews in their captivity at Babylon, by the assurance, that, in the Lord's appointed time, they should be brought out of their bondage, and that, however small might be the human probabilities, and however dark the prospect of their restoration to their own land, He had means in His power which they knew nothing of, and would overrule and order the most

seemingly conflicting events, so as to bring about their promised deliverance. Yet, since the general principle of the Lord's dealings with His creatures is at all times so much the same, we may apply the assurance of the text, as a guide for our expectations concerning the Lord's purposes in the period of our time that cometh, and believe that He will, as He has done in times past, "bring the blind by a way that they knew not, and lead them in paths that they have not known; that He will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." May the blessed Spirit of the Eternal God be with us, and guide and bless and sanctify these our considerations to the good of our immortal souls!

I. And the first consideration, which a view of the text suggests to our notice, is, that THOSE, WITH WHOM THE LORD DEALS IN HIS SOVEREIGNTY AND IN HIS LOVE, ARE BLIND; BLIND TO THE TENDENCY OF HIS PROVIDENTIAL DEALINGS, BLIND TO THE PURPOSES OF HIS GRACE.

1. Men are, first, blind by nature to *the purposes of the Lord's grace*. Clear as their view may be of the things of this life, and distinct their perception of their own interests in matters of present advancement, yet how little do men

seem to perceive the true nature of their position here with regard to the things of Eternity, how blind are they to their real condition as sinners in the sight of God, how dark their understandings in the matter of their true interest with regard to their soul's wellbeing. So has it ever been from the time of Adam's fall. In the day that "his eyes were opened, and he became as a god, knowing good and evil ;"* in that day his spiritual sense was darkened, and he became blind in the things of God. So was it in the days when the lights of human science shone brightest upon heathen lands, and men's eyes seemed wide open to the pursuits of literature or art. By all this searching they could not "find out God ;"† yea, they were "alienated from Him through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their hearts."‡ So has it continued to be up to the present day. Vast as has been the progress of worldly knowledge, and almost inconceivable the extent to which the faculties of man have been developed in the discoveries and improvements of the day with regard to the things of this life, the mind of man is naturally as dark as ever to the simple truth of God's word, as blind, while unenlightened by the Spirit of God, as it ever was, to the true interests of an undying spirit. Yet

* Gen. iii. 5.

† Job xi. 7.

‡ Eph. iv. 18.

it is from among those who were thus blind, that the Lord has in times past gathered out a people for Himself; it is such as these that the Lord has in time past enlightened, quickened, converted, saved; and from among these, we cannot question, He will yet gather many, bringing them out of this darkness of their unregeneracy, and leading them to the knowledge and the love of His name. Who is there, that is now rejoicing in the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, which has shone into his heart, that cannot look back upon a period, in which he was ignorant of the things of God, blinded by sin, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death; who is there, that can apply to himself, in all humility, yet in all gratitude to God, the thankful assurance "one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see,"* that may not find reason to hope, that may not take encouragement to pray, that, in the coming season, the same enlightening and quickening grace may awaken many more from their slumber, and cause them to walk in the light of life?

2. Men are blind, secondly, with regard to *the coming dispensations of God's providence*. "For all this, I consider in my heart," saith the preacher, "even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in

* John ix. 25.

the hand of God ; no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before him."* And this, unlike the other, is a species of blindness for which we have reason to be thankful. Anxious as man may sometimes be to lift the veil which hides the future from his view, yet who, that rightly considers the matter, will not rather rejoice, that the events that shall befall him are kept secret till they come. How often should we have shrunk from the trials that were approaching, could we have foreseen their violence, and have sunk into despondency, or been terrified into powerless inactivity at the prospect that lay before us. How often should we have been elated beyond measure, and have forgotten our need of continual dependance upon the Lord's hand, and of continual diligence and exertion under His blessing, could we have foreseen the blessings that were in store for us, the bounty that the Lord's hand was about to scatter over our path. Could we be assured of the prolongation of life, would not the most spiritual be in danger of relaxing his watchfulness, and slackening the diligence, which the present uncertainty of the coming of the Son of Man enjoins? Could we anticipate the hour of our death, would not even more than do so be disposed to postpone the soul's concerns to

* Eccles. ix. 1.

the few moments that should precede it, and others renounce the duties of their daily life, that they might, as they would suppose, be more fit for that hour's approach? It is in love to us, then, and in mercy to our souls, that the Lord hides from our view the events of the hour that cometh. There was one thing kept secret even from the Son of Man, while in His humiliation upon earth; and how much more then may we believe it consistent with the wisdom and the love of God, that the future should be wrapped up from our gaze.

II. Yet, blind as men are to the purposes of God's providence, and blind as they naturally are to the dealings of His grace, we notice, in the second place, that IT IS THE LORD'S PURPOSE IN TIME TO COME, as it has been His design in time past, TO BRING THE BLIND BY A WAY THAT THEY KNEW NOT, TO LEAD THEM IN PATHS THAT THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.

1. And this, we believe to be the Lord's purpose, first, *concerning those that are yet in the darkness of their unconversion, yet blind to His gracious dealings with them, and to the true interests of their undying souls.* So long as the Lord Jesus delays His coming, so long, we believe, are there souls yet to be gathered out of the dark and benighted world, and to be

numbered among His people. We trust that He has much people in this place; that there are many souls in this congregation, yet alienated from God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts, whom the Lord purposes, it may be, during the coming year, "to turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God."* Yet such is not only the blindness, but the perverseness also of the unconverted heart, that, could men perceive beforehand the means or opportunity which the Lord should use for their conviction of sin, and conversion to the faith of Christ, they would strive to put themselves out of the way of the message of His Providence, they would shun, if possible, that word of His grace, which He designed to employ for the purpose. And therefore it is that He will bring them by a way that they know not. They shall be setting out perhaps upon some engagement of worldly pleasure, with their hearts full of the vanities of this life, and their spirits gay in the anticipation of coming joy, when some startling providence shall arrest their steps, and bring them to the serious inquiry, What shall become of their immortal souls? They shall be sitting, it may be, in the house of God, whither a mere sense of duty, or a compliance with custom may

* Acts xxvi. 18.

have guided their steps; and, in a moment when they looked for no such thing, the great Master of Assemblies, the Spirit of the Living God, shall fix His word like a nail in a sure place,* and bring them, as sin-convinced sinners, to the cross of Christ. They shall be lying, perhaps, in sleeplessness upon their beds, and, in the multitude of their thoughts from the vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, fear shall come upon them and trembling, which shall make all their bones to shake; then a still small voice within them shall inquire, How shall mortal man be just with God;† how shall I appear before the judgment-seat of Christ? Among the many that ran together in Jerusalem, on hearing of the wonderful thing that had happened in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles of the Lord, how little did the 3,000 imagine, that they were running to receive a message of life and peace and salvation to their souls!‡ In the earthquake at Philippi, when the foundations of the prison were shaken, and the bars and locks of the gates were burst asunder; when the jailor in his terror was about to plunge his sword into his heart,§ how little could any one have imagined that it was the moment of mercy and peace and blessing to his

* Eccles. xii. 11. † Job iv. 14—17. ‡ Acts ii.

§ Acts xvi. 26, 27.

soul. And how many have been the instances of a similar kind in the history of the conversions of souls to God, in which the Lord has been found of them that sought Him not, and manifested Himself unto them that looked not for Him.* And such, we doubt not, will be the Lord's way still. O! that He may have such purposes of love towards many souls in this assembly during the coming year; may He bring many, who yet are blind to His truth, by a way that they know not, and lead them by paths they have not known, to pardon and to peace through Jesus Christ!

2. And such we believe to be the purposes of the Lord, secondly, *with regard to those who, however enlightened by the grace of God, and delivered from darkness to light, are yet blind as to the future dealings of God's providence, and cannot even yet perceive the leadings of His grace concerning them.* Happily for the children of God, their times are in His hand. He ordereth all things for them according to the counsel of His own will.† And yet so blind are they, that often they are ready to cry out at a dispensation, which is an answer to their own prayer, and to murmur at those dealings of His providence, by which He is bringing about their conformity to the mind and image of Christ. How often is

* Isa. lxxv. 1.

† Eph. i. 11.

the prayer for patience answered by some bodily affliction sent from the Lord's hand, which in a manner compels the sufferer to throw himself for comfort and for strength upon the arm of God. How often is the prayer for submission to the will of God answered by some stroke of bereavement, which first convinces the soul of its inclination to rebel, and then brings it, wounded and bleeding, to the Lord's feet. How often is the Christian taught to appreciate more highly the blessings he enjoys, by having some of them removed from him, that he may feel their value in their loss. How often does the Christian learn more fully than before the need of his entire and ceaseless dependance upon God, by being left for a moment to himself, and sinking, as Peter did, amid the waves that foam around him. Such have been the Lord's dealings with His people in times past: such, we may well believe, they shall be in time to come. The ways of the Lord's providence may seem dark: the paths, in which He leads His people, may appear crooked and rough; but He will make all things work together for the good of those that love Him.* He will give them strength according to their day, and grace according to their need;† and He will cause the most trying dispensations of His hand to produce

* Rom. viii. 28. † Deut. xxxiii. 25; 2 Cor. xii. 9.

the peaceable fruits of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby.* Let such, beloved, be your hope and prayer concerning the time that is before you: that, however dark and mysterious may be the dispensations of the Lord's hand, He may bring you through them to an increased acquaintance with His will, and experience of His faithfulness and truth; and prepare you by them, day by day, for the full enjoyment of His love in His heavenly kingdom.

III. And for the encouragement and comfort of those who are thus taken under the Lord's guidance, we would briefly notice, in the third place, **THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD CONCERNING THEIR FINAL PRESERVATION.** For, however dark may be His dispensations, however trying the path in which He leads them, yet "These things," He saith, "will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

It is not easy for the Christian to realize the Lord's protection and favor at a time when all things seem to be going against him. The great Adversary felt the advantage of such an opportunity as this for drawing near to the Son of Man with his subtle insinuation, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." It requires a measure of that same

* Heb. xii. 11.

grace, by which the blessed Jesus overcame the enemy, to be able to reply, as He did, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* It was in order to teach the Israelites this great truth, that He humbled them, and suffered them to hunger, and fed them with manna, which neither they nor their fathers had known.† Often had they been tempted to murmur, as if God had forgotten them, and left them to perish in the wilderness. But, though He heard their murmurings, and punished them, still "the Lord would not forsake His people for His own great name's sake."‡

Such has been the Lord's way of old. And such, we are assured, it will still be. We are "confident of this one thing," at least, concerning the children of God, "that He which hath begun a good work in them will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ."§ It may be, that, for a small moment, He may seem to forsake them, yet with great mercies will He gather them. It may be, that, in a little wrath, He may hide His face from them for a moment, yet "With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."|| However dark, however trying, however afflictive, may be the

* Matt. iv. 3, 4. † Deut. viii. 3. ‡ 1 Sam. xii. 22.

§ Phil. i. 6. || Isaiah liv. 7, 8.

dispensations of the Lord's hand, they are not proofs of His anger—they should not lead us for a moment to question His love. For “He knoweth them that put their trust in Him;”* and “He will never leave them nor forsake them.”† Bear this in mind, then, beloved, concerning the events of the year that opens before you. Ye cannot foresee the precise nature of those events—ye cannot foretell the particulars of the Lord's dispensations to youward; but ye may know, that, in His most trying dealings, He is bringing you, by a way ye knew not, into closer communion with Himself; ye may know, that, even though He visit you with a rod, His loving-kindness He will not utterly take from you, nor suffer His truth to fail.‡

1. The considerations in which we have now engaged, should lead us, beloved, first, to AN INQUIRY CONCERNING THE PAST. It is the experience of the past which gives us, as it were, a key to the understanding of the promise of the text. It has been the Lord's way of old to bring the blind by a way that they knew not, and to draw them by dispensations of providence and messages of grace, at a time at which, perhaps, they were least looking for such a blessing. How, then, beloved, should ye not inquire—How have the events of the past year been applied to

* Nah. i. 7.

† Heb. xiii. 5.

‡ Ps. lxxxix. 33.

you? There have been many mercies crowded into its course. There have been some startling providences calling to you at its commencement and its close. How have these messages from God unto your souls been received? Are ye still blind, beloved? Still in the darkness of your unregeneracy; still in the alienation of your hearts from God; still sitting in darkness and the shadow of death? O! consider, ye who forget God! He has been continually pleading with you. He now, by the remembrance of the past, appeals to your hearts. It may be, that the Lord yet has purposes of mercy concerning you. We pray that, during the year that cometh, He may bring many of you by a way that ye know not. Yet, O! think! after the many mercies, the many warnings ye receive, what will be your soul's condition, should a sudden summons call you to his bar, and find you unprepared to meet your God!

2. These considerations should lead you, secondly, beloved, to A PRESENT SUBMISSION of yourselves, and all that concerns you, to the will of our covenant God. What lesson is the uncertainty of all earthly things so calculated to impress, what truth does the experience of the past so powerfully teach, as the blessedness of being enabled to place yourselves entirely in the Lord's hands, and to have no will but His?

While there are many that say, Who will show us any good? the language which becomes the believer in Jesus, the language which the promises of the Lord's grace and the dispensations of His providence are well calculated to inspire, is this: Lord, lift Thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!* Do you desire riches? "The blessing of the Lord, that maketh rich; and He addeth no sorrow with it."† Do you desire protection? "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of those that trust in Him."‡ Do ye desire joy? And who has such cause to be of good cheer as he who has committed himself to Christ, and had his sins forgiven him for His Name's sake?§ Surely, beloved, if ye have not yet done so, the present is a good time to begin to commit your way unto the Lord. Place yourselves in His hands. Lay your sins upon Jesus. Cast your care upon the Lord. And He will bring you through all the darkness and ruggedness of the way to His kingdom at the last.

3. For the considerations we have engaged in suggest to us, thirdly, CONFIDENCE FOR THE FUTURE in the lovingkindness of the Lord. "The Lord knoweth them that are His:" "He

* Ps. iv. 6. † Prov. x. 22. ‡ 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

§ 1 John ii. 12.

preserveth the feet of His saints, lest any hurt them. He keepeth watch over them night and day."* And having brought them out of their blindness by a way that they knew not, He will not leave them nor forsake them till He brings them to the promised land, and gives them the inheritance He had provided. Ask ye, beloved, of the days that are past, who ever put their trust in Him and were confounded? And look forward to the future with the assurance that, whatever clouds and darkness may surround the throne of God,† yet He who sitteth thereon will make all things work together for the good of those that love Him.‡ Beloved, is the Lord thus your confidence; have ye thus committed yourselves to Him? He may have trials in store for you; He may have sufferings to lay upon you; He may lead you through the wilderness; He may hedge your way up with thorns; but how light will all this appear, when ye look back from the land of promise upon the way the Lord hath led you, and see the bright side of every cloud that here darkened your path!

* 2 Tim. ii. 19; 1 Sam. ii. 9; Is. xxvii. 3. † Ps. xcvi. 2.

‡ Rom. viii. 28.

SERMON II.

REPENTANCE.

ST. MATTHEW IX. 13.

I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

“THE Lord cannot be tempted with evil.”* And among the various evidences, by which the blessed Jesus commends Himself to us as the Lord our God, there are few more satisfactory than the ease with which He detected the subtle purpose, which lay hid in many of the questions with which He was beset, and drew from the cavils of His enemies an occasion of edification, of correction, of reproof.

The Scribes and Pharisees continually assailed Him with crafty questions, and perplexing cavils. With a zeal and watchfulness worthy of a better cause, they tracked His steps, as He went about

* James i. 13.

teaching "and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people;"* and nothing seemed to escape their malicious eye, on which they could possibly ground an attempt to bring His character as a teacher into disrepute, or to weaken His wide-spreading influence over the multitudes that thronged Him. Alas! for that perverseness, and alienation, and enmity of the heart of man, which led them, which induces so many in every age, to "reject the counsel of God against themselves,"† to cavil at, rather than close with, the gracious offers of salvation by Christ Jesus, and to shut themselves up under the condemnation of those who will not even come to Jesus that they may have life.‡

Yet, while we pity *their* perverseness, and lament the blindness and self will, which prompted their malicious treatment of the lowly Saviour, what cause have we for gratitude to God, that He has so overruled their wicked purpose, as to make their cavils the occasion of setting forth to us some of the most precious and consoling truths, which the Gospel of the blessed God contains. The objections, which they urged with the malicious design of entrapping the Saviour, are frequently suggested by the cor-

* Matt. iv. 23. † Luke vii. 30. ‡ John v. 40.

ruption of the flesh, or the subtlety of the Devil, to the minds and hearts of those who are anxious about their soul's condition, and earnestly desirous of following the Lord fully. With what comfort may they dwell upon the precious statements of the truth, with which our Saviour put aside the captious question of the Pharisee, and in which He has left a message of love for every poor soul, that desires the knowledge of salvation through His Name.

How well are these reflections justified by the circumstances, which called forth the gracious assurance in the text! Our Lord had called Levi from the receipt of custom; and he had readily forsaken his money-table, and gone after Jesus. Desirous of doing honor to the Master who had called him, and of affording, at the same time, an opportunity to many of his old companions of hearing the gracious words which ever fell from the lips of Him, who, as much at the festal board as in the privacy of the Mount of Olives, kept in view the great purpose of His coming, the new disciple made a feast for his Lord, and invited many publicans and sinners to come and sit down with Jesus and with His disciples. The Scribes and Pharisees, in that self-righteous spirit which prompted the proud "Stand by, for I am holier than thou," affected an anxiety for the character of Jesus, which,

they thought was compromised by such associations as these. "Why eateth your Master," said they to His disciples, "with publicans and sinners?" "But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Go ye, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." These persons, by whom ye now see me surrounded, are the very objects of my mission. I am come to seek and to save that which was lost. And then, when I am surrounded by a crowd of sinners, of those whom the world casts out as evil, and a pharisaic self-righteousness would leave uncared for in their sins; then, when I see a throng of guilty, perishing souls, hanging upon my lips, and drinking in the word of life,—then do I see the great purpose of my coming in some measure realized; then do I see something of the travail of my soul, and am filled with a joy which thrills through the courts of heaven, and wakens the rejoicings of angels' tongues.* Precious truth this to the poor sinner; to him, that, convinced of his guilt, and groaning over his corruptions, is ready to exclaim with Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"† Nay, saith the gracious Jesus, I came not to

* Isa. liii. 11; Luke xv. 10.

† Luke v. 8.

condemn you but to save. Come thou to me; and you shall find peace to your conscience and rest to your soul.

I would desire then, beloved, to invite your attention at the present time to the truths contained in these precious words of the Lord Jesus in the text. In the order of our Church's services, which presents to us, in her yearly round, now one and now another great doctrine of the Scriptures, as the special subject of our meditations, the great duty of Evangelical repentance is, at this season,* urged upon our special attention. The words of the text will lead us, it may be hoped, to some profitable reflections upon this important subject, and guide us to the contemplation of that "repentance which is unto salvation, not to be repented of."† May the blessed Spirit of truth be out-poured upon us, and sanctify our present engagements to the awakening, conviction, conversion, of each soul here present, as He may see our need to be!

In taking the words of the text, then, as the guide of our present meditations, let us consider, first, THE GREAT PURPOSE OF THE SAVIOUR'S COMING; secondly, THE PERSONS TO WHOM HIS MISSION ESPECIALLY ADDRESSED ITSELF; and, thirdly, THE NATURE OF THE PARTICULAR BLESS-

* Preached in Lent.

† 2 Cor. vii. 10.

ING to which He calleth them. And may He teach us by His own Spirit, how to apply His words to our souls' good !

I. And in considering, in the first place, THE GREAT PURPOSE OF THE SAVIOUR'S COMING, we observe,

1. That His mission was NOT ONE OF VENGEANCE OR CONDEMNATION. Who could have wondered if it had been so? He had come down before to visit the earth. He had poured out a "flood upon the world of the ungodly,"* and swept away whole generations by the deluge of His wrath. He had opened the windows of heaven, and rained down fire and brimstone upon the cities of the plain, and left, in their smoking ruins, an awful monument of His hatred against sin, and His vengeance upon the sinner. And still men went on, only plunging deeper and yet deeper into sin, and provoking Him yet more to anger by their increasing abominations. Who then could have wondered, had the time now come, when the Lord should have sworn in His wrath, that He would utterly make an end of man upon the Earth? But no! His great purpose in coming was,

2. One of UNBOUNDED TENDERNESS AND LOVE. The warnings of God's vengeance had been for-

* 2 Pet. ii. 5.

gotten, the messages of His grace been slighted and despised. The servants, whom the Lord had sent with the remonstrances of His love, had been persecuted and slain. And then, when the cup of man's iniquity seemed full, and the cry of his transgression rose up before the Lord,—then he said, I have yet one Son, my well-beloved; I will send Him unto them: it may be they will reverence my Son.* And this was the last effort of the Lord's love for a guilty world. He has nothing so precious left, by which He can again appeal to the heart of rebellious man. His own Son, His only-begotten, the beloved of His Soul, “came not to judge, but to save the world;”† and how shall they escape, who neglect so great salvation?‡

II. Let us consider, in the second place, THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS to whom the mission of the Lord's love especially addresses itself. And here the text guides us to the remark, that,

1. Our Lord did NOT come to call THE RIGHT-EOUS. If there be such a person upon earth, one who has kept all the commandments of God, in the spirit as well as in the letter, from his youth up;—one who has loved God with all his heart, and all his mind, and all his soul, and all

* Luke xx. 9, 13.

† John xii. 47.

‡ Heb. ii. 3.

his strength, and his neighbor as he has loved himself;—such an one has no need of a Saviour: he can stand the judgment of the law, and claim the promise of life upon the terms, “The man that doeth these things shall live by them.”* But, though there be no such person upon earth, there are too many who imagine themselves such, or nearly such; who plead, that, though they may not have served God so perfectly as He requires, they have done the best they could, and, as for their neighbor, they have never done harm to any one. Shall we say that these have no need of a Saviour? In their own estimation they need none. Shall we say, that Christ came not to call them? Nay, not so! for in His sight they are vile, and, as such, are appealed to by His love. But His call has no suitableness, no interest for them. They are not sick; the invitation then of the physician has no reference to them: they are not perishing; the offer of the gift of life, then, meets no sympathy in their hearts. Think of this, beloved, I beseech you. If you have any righteousness of your own; if ye have any power to do anything for your own salvation; if ye are anything better than lost sinners; the Gospel provides no Saviour for you, the calls of the blessed Jesus have no reference to you. For,

* Rom. x. 5.

2. He came to call SINNERS.

Nothing more than this would have been necessary, one would suppose, to show us, that our Lord came to invite the whole world to Himself. But, as we have already observed, that, though there be none righteous upon earth, there are many who in their self-righteousness turn away from the gracious offers of the Gospel; so we here perceive, that, though all have sinned, all are not so conscious, so convinced of sin, as to admit the suitableness of the call to themselves, and to feel their need of closing with its terms. While, then, the message of the text has nothing in it calculated to supply comfort, nothing in it likely even to awaken an interest in any, "that say they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,"* it comes as a word of love from the gracious Saviour to every poor soul, that is bruised and broken by a sense of sin, and writing bitter things against itself, as condemned and forsaken of the Lord. Who is there, that has sinned against the Lord, that has gone on transgressing His commandments, and provoking His wrath; beloved, the Gospel passes by those who trust in themselves that they are righteous, to seek

* Rev. iii. 17.

you out; it comes to you in your low, your lost estate, and speaks to you of salvation: it points you, as Moses directed the eye of the dying Israelite to the brazen Serpent, to Him who was lifted up upon the cross: it gives a voice to His dying agonies, and says, "Look unto me and be saved;" turn unto me and live!

III. Here, then, we are led, in the third place, to consider THE PARTICULAR BLESSING, to which the Lord Jesus calls the sinners, whom He came to save. "I came," he saith, "to call sinners TO REPENTANCE;" not to save them with all their sins upon them, not to admit them just as they are to heaven; but to call them to repentance as the way to heaven,—to give them that repentance which is not to be repented of. What then is this repentance to which the Lord calls the sinner?

1. What is it not?

It is *not a mere fit of overwhelming sorrow*, because of any sin, in which we may have been detected, any grievous transgression, by which conscience has been alarmed. This may, indeed, be in the Lord's mercy overruled, and made the commencement of a genuine repentance; but too frequently, alas! it partakes but of the nature of that sorrow of the world that

worketh death.* The dread of the Lord's vengeance, perhaps, still more, the dread of the world's reproach, may, for the moment, bear one down; but, too generally, the impression speedily wears off, and leaves the soul just as much in love with sin as ever.

It is *not a mere temporary penance on account of sin*, by which, in the true spirit of popery, many seem to think they are atoning for the worldliness of the past year, and from which they come forth, just as worldly, and as far from the kingdom of God, as ever. This was the sum and substance of *their* religion, who found fault with the Saviour for seeking the salvation of sinners; this is the mark of a Pharisaic spirit in every age, and savors little of the true spirit of the Gospel.

2. What is, then, an Evangelical repentance?

Whatever its leading features may be, we find that it is put for THE WHOLE OF THAT WORK IN THE SINNER'S SOUL, WHICH FORMS HIS QUALIFICATION, OR MEETNESS FOR ENTERING INTO GOD'S KINGDOM. It is the strait and narrow "way, which leadeth unto life."† It is "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."‡

Comprising, then, as it does, the whole work

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

† Matt. vii. 14.

‡ Eph. iv. 24.

of God in the sinner's soul, we shall perceive that repentance, a scriptural repentance, consists of—

A deep conviction of sin. We have already remarked, that, although all are sinners, all are not so aware of—so ready to acknowledge their condition—as to know that they are just the persons, whom the Saviour says, He came to call to repentance. It is the office of the Holy Spirit, when He comes into the world, to convince the soul of sin. It is His work to bring home to the heart of the sinner, such a sense of the pollution of his nature, and the corruption of his heart, and the alienation of his life from the mind and will of God, as to bring him, convinced of his ruined state, to seek salvation for his soul, and to lead him, aware that he is perishing, to turn the eye of faith to Jesus, and to cry to Him for deliverance.

When this conviction is the genuine work of the Spirit, it leads to true *contrition on account of sin*. “Fools make a mock at sin.” The worldly acknowledge that they are sinners, yet make the acknowledgment with as little concern as though there were no consequences annexed to sin. The penitent is overwhelmed with a sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; he trembles at the thought how hateful sin is in the sight of God; he mourns over the wounds

which he perceives sin to have inflicted on the lowly Saviour; he is bruised and broken in heart under the intolerable burden with which sin presses upon his soul. There may, however, be much sorrow for sin resembling this contrition, which yet is no part of genuine repentance; much that, like the bitter tears of Esau, or the grief of Judas, is the sorrow of the world that worketh death. It is not easy always to distinguish the precious from the vile at this stage of the progress of the work. But genuine contrition for sin may be known, in that it always leads to—

Conversion from sin. Whatever views we may have of the sinfulness of sin; however we may be horrified by a dread of the awful vengeance due to sin; however we may mourn over the evils sin has brought into the world, and even grieve at the wounds it has inflicted upon Christ, there is no true contrition that does not lead to conversion; there is no true repentance, which does not involve the turning from sin unto holiness, and “from the power of Satan unto God.” The repentance, which proceeds from a godly sorrow leads unto salvation. It is the ceasing to do evil; and the learning to do well. It is the renunciation of the world, and the following of Christ. It is the denial of self, and the taking up the cross of Christ. It is the

casting off the bondage of the Devil, and the presenting the body and the soul a living sacrifice to God, acceptable unto Him through Jesus Christ.

This, beloved, is the repentance of which the Saviour speaks; this is the repentance, to which He came to call the sinners among whom He walked; this is the repentance which His Gospel still urges upon all, that would enter the Lord's kingdom. Let the consideration of the subject suggest to you now, beloved, one or two practical reflections.

1. And first, what ENCOURAGEMENT do the words of the text hold out to the sinner to repent and turn to God! Here we have the gracious assurance of the Lord Jesus, that sinners are the special objects of His mission; that He came into the world for no other purpose, than "to seek and to save that which was lost."* And yet, to shew the depth of that darkness, in which Satan enshrouds the minds of men—so long as men are unconvinced of sin, they seem to have no fears about their salvation; but, so soon as they are convinced by the Spirit of God that they are sinners, and therefore just the persons whom Christ Jesus came to save, then they begin to cry out as if the door of mercy was forever shut against them. Yet it is a precious

* Luke xix. 10.

thing to hear that cry ; it is a joyful sound to hear the mourning of a soul, that has become aware of its captivity, and begun to feel the galling of the chains, from which it fears there can be no escape. Until this time, the message of the Gospel seemed like an offer of bread to those that were full, of medicine to those that were in health. But now the soul is hungry, yea, perishing for the food of life ; now the soul is sick, yea, dying under the pressure of the disease of sin. To such a soul, then, it surely will be glad tidings, that the Saviour came to save just such from death ; to such a soul the invitation will surely be a welcome one, to come and turn to Him who has redeemed it. Is the soul conscious of its sins ? He calleth it to repentance. Has sin abounded, so that the soul is overwhelmed by the swelling tide of its iniquities ? There grace does much more abound, and the love of Jesus is yet more magnified by saving such a soul from death. Is there, then, such a soul here ?—One that has been convinced by the Spirit of God of its lost condition, and is writing bitter things against itself, as though there could be no salvation for one that has so grievously transgressed ? “ To you,” beloved, “ is the word of this salvation sent.” Arise ! behold ! He calleth you. If you were not a sinner, there were no message in the

Gospel for you ; but since you know and feel that you are a sinner, behold ! Christ calleth you ; turn unto Him and live.

2. How forcibly does the text impress upon us the NECESSITY of turning to the Lord. This necessity is surely pressed upon us by a view of the amazing love of Christ. He loved the souls of men so much, that He willingly came down from the glories of heaven, and endured privation, suffering, and death, that He might redeem them from destruction. Yet, even His love could not procure for them an entrance to God's glories, except they repent and turn to God. Nay, even His love for them could *desire* no other terms. Even had it been possible for Him to have procured admission for a soul with all its sins upon it into the purity of heaven, it would have been no boon. It is even in love to the souls of men, that He, who came to save them calls them to repentance, or the conversion of the heart to God, as the narrow way which leadeth to salvation. Who, then, can enter heaven, but by the way which Christ himself points out ? Who shall deem himself meet to dwell with God, but he that, convinced of sin, has been converted unto God, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus ? There are those, alas ! who cry out against the idea of salvation being entirely of the free gift of God in Christ Jesus

as tending to immorality, who yet think it not strange that men should hope to go to heaven, who give no evidence of grace or godliness. Strange, that there should be so much difficulty in understanding, that the very "goodness of God leadeth to repentance."* Beloved, the call of the text, coming as it does from the lips of the loving Saviour himself, urges on you the necessity of conversion to God in all that would dwell with Him. He that came to save you calls you to repentance as the path to heaven. Have ye, beloved, who are hoping for salvation, ever yet entered on that way? Have ye been yet convinced of sin? have ye yet been bowed down beneath its burden? have ye yet laid that burden upon Christ, and by Him been set at liberty to keep the commandments of God? If not, O! what but a miserable delusion can be the hope of entering into God's kingdom!

3. And, lastly, the call of the text points out to you the **ONLY WAY**, by which ye can repent and turn to God. It is, in fact, a call to Christ, —to Him who is "exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance and forgiveness of sins."† The calls of the Gospel are all invitations to come to Christ, as the fountain-head of grace, the spring of all true godliness, the treasury in which are laid up rich stores of

* Rom. ii. 4.

† Acts v. 31.

blessing for His people. And this is especially the case with regard to the call to repentance. When the Spirit convinces of sin, He brings home chiefly a sense of the iniquity of not believing on Jesus.* There can be no true sorrow for sin, except in him who looks upon it as having nailed Jesus to the tree. There can be no real turning from sin, except in him, who finds pardon and peace for his soul through the blood of Christ. There may be sorrow; there may be reformation; but there can be no genuine repentance, except in him, who has laid his sins upon Jesus and found peace with God through Him. When Jesus calls you to repentance, then, He calls you to Himself, that ye may receive the grace of repentance at His hands. Who is there, then, of you, beloved, that acknowledges the obligation, that admits the urgency of the call to repentance? Strive not to accomplish this work for yourselves: labour not, like the ill-used Israelites, to make brick without straw; but go to Christ. He promises His blessings to those that ask: and none, that come empty to Him to be filled, are sent empty away. Let Christ then, beloved, be your all-in-all: whatever may be the grace ye need, go to Him for it; and "of His fulness" shall ye assuredly receive, even "grace for grace."†

* John xvi. 8.

† John i. 16.

SERMON III.

EVE BEGUILLED.

2 CORINTHIANS XI. 2.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

THERE are few subjects brought before us in the Scriptures of truth, the contemplation of which is more painful, and yet calculated, under the Lord's blessing, to be more profitable to us, than that of the fall of man. We see in it such an evidence of the frailty of our nature, even under the most favourable circumstances ; we perceive in it such a proof of the subtilty and power of the great enemy of souls ; we discover about it such signs of the long-suffering, and forbearance, and grace of the loving and merciful Creator ; that the view is well calculated to humble us in

the dust of self-abasement, and yet to exalt in our esteem the preciousness, and sufficiency, and fulness of the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We trace to it such fearful consequences to the sinning pair themselves; we perceive in it such fatal results, as displayed in the natural bias to evil of every one of their descendants; we look forward to such tremendous consequences, as yet to be manifested in all that live and die in their unregeneracy; that we may well pore, with wonder and with awe, over the momentous record of that sad event, which the Bible, and the Bible only, can supply.

The Apostle seems desirous, in the text, to improve some of the solemn reflections arising from a view of the successful assault of the Evil One upon the mother of us all, by way of warning to the Corinthian converts against the danger they were in of falling away from Christ. The history of that sad event is brought before us in the reading of God's Holy Word this day;* and it may, in the Lord's grace, be profitable to us, too, to contemplate the perils which still encompass the servant and follower of Jesus, that, being not ignorant of the devices of the great enemy, we may be the more on our guard against his approach, the more watchful against his suggestions of evil. Who is there, charged

* Sexagesima Sunday.

with the care of the souls of his fellow-sinners, that can reflect upon the craft and energy and perseverance of the Evil One, and not tremble, lest, by his subtle insinuations, he may draw some souls into his snare, and entrap them to their ruin? Who is there, among the souls that have been rescued from the bondage of the devil, and gathered into the fold of Christ, that has not cause to be continually on the watch, lest he, who so fatally succeeded in his attempts upon the yet guileless and unsinning Eve, should be enabled to regain his hold upon a heart which is prone continually to sin, and lead those souls again captive, which have even been delivered from his snare? The safety of the believer's soul consists not in his despising the craft or the power of the enemies that assail him; but in his being so aware of their subtlety, and so conscious of his own danger, that he clings unceasingly for safety to the only Rock of refuge, the only tower of defence.

The consideration of the Apostle's fears concerning the Corinthians, viewed in connexion with the successful temptations by which the Evil One seduced our first parents into sin, may afford matter for profitable reflection at this and every period of the probationary condition of the souls for which Jesus died. I would invite your attention, beloved, to the subject, and pray

the Lord so to bless our meditations upon it, that ye, being not ignorant of the devices of Satan, may be led to be more watchful against them, and to resist them "stedfast in the faith"* of Him, who overcame him by His precious bloodshedding.

The words of the text will suggest to us a view, first, of THE ENGAGEMENTS OF EVERY CHRISTIAN'S SOUL TO CHRIST OUR LORD; secondly, of THE WILES WITH WHICH THE ENEMY OF SOULS SEEKS TO DRAW AWAY THE SOUL FROM ITS ALLEGIANCE; and, thirdly, of THE ESPECIAL DANGER, INTO WHICH THE SOUL IS LIABLE TO FALL in listening for one moment to the suggestions of the Tempter. May the Spirit of the Living God be present with us to bless these considerations to our souls' good!

I. And in considering, in the first place, THE ENGAGEMENTS BY WHICH EVERY CHRISTIAN'S SOUL IS BOUND TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, we remark,

1. That the very fears which the text expresses seem to imply, that *the souls thus spoken of have been brought out of their natural state of unregeneracy and corruption, and placed in a state of grace, of acceptance, and of favour with God.* The expression of a fear, lest they should

* 1 Pet. v. 9.

be drawn away by temptation, would be unsuitable concerning those who are yet in their sins. The danger of being corrupted from the simplicity of Christ can only exist in the case of those, who have been brought into union and communion with Christ by the exercise of a lively faith in Him. We have our fears, indeed, and awful fears they are, concerning those who are yet in their sins; but those fears arise, not from the danger of their being drawn away, but from their never having come to Christ, and, so, being still under condemnation. We have our anxieties, indeed, and overwhelming anxieties they are, concerning those who bear the name, and have even been outwardly admitted into the Church of Christ, but are still dead in trespasses and sins: but our anxieties are awakened, not because they are the marks of the temptations of the Devil, but because they are already in possession of the strong man armed, who keeps his goods in a fatal peace. Too many such we find, who even make light of the idea, that "the adversary, the Devil, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour;" * who look upon the notion of the Devil's being continually at hand, plying the soul with subtle temptations, as a mere enthusiast's dream: who, at least, to speak from their

* 1 Pet. v. 8.

own experience, know nothing of any so constant temptation, have never found themselves so beset with the suggestions of sin. Alas! for them! The Devil has no need to tempt them, when they are already just what he wishes. The only effort, which he need put forth for them, is to keep them blind to the chains with which he binds them, and to soothe them in the fatal sleep, in which they are already lying. Alas! for them indeed! O may the Lord lighten their eyes, lest they sleep the sleep of death!

2. Yet we observe, secondly, that *every soul, awakened from the sleep of sin*, and brought, by the grace of the Spirit of God, into a state of acceptance and peace [with God through Jesus Christ, *is* ESPOUSED, *as it were*, to Christ, engaged to Him by a perpetual covenant, pledged to Him to be His for ever. Thus St. Paul, in the verse preceding the text, says of those to whom the Lord had blessed the ministry of the word, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." This simile is one of constant use in the Scriptures of truth; and it is one, which, in all ages and under all circumstances of the world, presents to us the strongest illustration, which the relationships of human life afford, of the intimate nature of the engagements by which the converted soul is bound to Christ, and of the

devotion of heart, of feeling, of affection, which should be sustained continually towards Him on the part of all that have pledged themselves to Him. Who is there, that, in the transactions of daily life, would be satisfied, in the case of such an engagement as has been referred to, with the most perfect correctness of outward deportment, while yet aware that the heart's affections were estranged and set upon another? Who is there, with any delicacy of feeling, that would be satisfied with an acknowledgment that the engagement was a binding one, and would desire that it should be fulfilled, while yet made fully conscious that the feelings of the other party had undergone a change, and the affections grown cold? And can we suppose, that Christ will be satisfied, in the case of those that are espoused to Him, with a state of feeling or affection which would be spurned in the engagements of human life? Will He be satisfied, that there is, on the part of those that have joined themselves to Him, no glaring departure from the outward conduct of a Christian, while yet it is evident that the heart's affections are not set upon Him, but are engaged upon the world? Will He be satisfied, that those who bear His name, and are, outwardly at least, espoused to Him, should be willing to enter upon the glories of His kingdom at last, while

yet they show no love for Him or for His cause, if they are not even ashamed to profess that He alone is worthy of their love? Nay, surely, the soul that gives itself to Christ, the soul that, being really a member of His Church, becomes, as Adam said of the newly-formed Eve, "a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones,"* is pledged to give to Him, not the mere homage of an outward service, not the tribute of mere indifference to His cause, still less the estrangement of a worldly life, but the best and warmest affections of the heart, a heart in which He may reign, and reign alone.

3. And we may here, thirdly, observe briefly, that *these, and these alone, are they, who shall be presented at the great day to the Lord Jesus* to be united to Him for ever, where there shall be no further risk of estrangement or of change. "I heard," saith the beloved disciple, "I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of

* Gen. ii. 23; Eph. v. 30.

saints!"* And who then but the saints, who but "they which are written in the Lamb's book of life,"† who but they, that "are washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,"‡ shall be admitted to this glorious and eternal union with the Lord Jesus? Who but they are truly members of His Church on earth? Who but they shall have His glory put upon them in the day, when His "glorious Church" shall be presented unto Him, "not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing?"§

II. The time of espousal, however, is, as it were, a time of probation; and, during this time, the enemy of souls puts forth all his efforts to pluck if it were but one jewel from the Saviour's crown, to ensnare if it were but one soul, that has cast off his bondage, and taken up the yoke of Christ. Let us proceed, in the second place, to consider some of THE WILES BY WHICH HE CLOKES HIS ASSAULTS UPON THE PEOPLE THAT ARE PLEDGED TO CHRIST.

It is not to be supposed, that any enlightened soul, notwithstanding the corruption of nature which remains even in the regenerate,|| would listen for a moment to any suggestion, which

* Rev. xix. 6—8. † Rev. xxi. 27. ‡ 1 Cor. vi. 11.

§ Eph. v. 27. || Ninth Article.

plainly bore the Devil's mark upon it, any more than we can believe that Eve would have hearkened to his voice, had she known him to be the great Enemy of God. But, as he approached her in the form of a then lovely creature, so does he even now assume the form of an angel of light, and approaches the soul of the believer, as he did our mother, with suggestions calculated to lead—

1. To *mere speculative enquiries* upon the word and truth of God. There had been little danger of our first parent's fall, had she simply held on to the command of God, and been content with the remembrance that HE had said so; and not ventured beyond her depth into any examination of the propriety or reasonableness of the command. And the soul of the Christian walketh safely, so long as it is content to abide by the Word of God, and to take what He says as the truth, simply because He has said it. Carnal reason, indeed, rebels against such submission as this, as if it were binding the human intellect in intolerable bondage. The pride of the natural heart revolts against such subjection as this, as though it were derogatory to the dignity of human nature, and unworthy of a being so gifted as man. But there is field enough for human speculations, there are subjects enough for human investigation, without

attempting to subject the commands of God to our puny questionings. "I do send thee to the house of Israel," was the commission of the Lord to Ezekiel, "and thou shalt say unto them; Thus saith the Lord God."* The only enquiry, which becomes the soul to which this message comes, is this, What hath the Lord spoken? If there are secret things in human science, which the uninitiated cannot understand; if there are depths in nature's mysteries, which the profoundest philosopher cannot fathom; how much more is it to be supposed, there are secret things in the purposes of God, and depths in the mysteries of His dispensations, which "belong to the Lord our God?"† To him that would enquire, "Are there few that be saved?" the answer which God gives is, "Strive thou to enter in at the strait gate."‡ To him that would ask, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" the Lord's reply is, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."§ Let the world reject such submission of spirit as this; the safety of the Christian's soul consists in his limiting his speculations to the enquiry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"||

If this wile be unsuccessful, the Enemy would lead the soul of the believer—

* Ezek. ii. 4. † Deut. xxix. 29. ‡ Luke xiii. 23, 24.

§ John xiii. 6—8. || Acts ix. 6.

2. To *questionings of the love and goodness of the Lord*. Such was his suggestion to our first parent. He dares not, lest he should alarm her, to charge God openly with unkindness to His creatures; but he would lead her to imply, that there was something needlessly withheld, which, if tasted, would confer the highest boon. Such, too, was the suggestion with which He first approached the second Adam. He would have had Him imply, that a loving God would not leave His Son to suffer the pangs of hunger, when He could so easily supply His wants. How many are the avenues, by which the enemy of our souls attempts to introduce such insinuations as these into the heart of the follower of Christ! How various the dispensations, both in providence and in grace, in which the soul of the believer is tempted to inquire, 'Can there be the hand of love in this? His wisdom I cannot question; His sovereign right to do with me just what He pleases, I hesitate not to admit; but is it *love* to wound me thus? Is it in love to me, that I am kept in penury? Is it in love, that I am bent with pain? Is it love, that strikes from me the dearest object of my fond regard? Is it love for me, that hides God's face from me, and leaves me sitting in darkness, and having no light?' These are enquiries by which the Enemy

of souls would lead the Christian's soul to doubt the tenderness and loving-kindness of the Lord. These are questions which, if once harbored, would soon draw the soul away from God, and give the enemy an ungodly triumph over those whom the Lord redeemed. To him, that is tempted to question the Lord's love in any of the dispensations of His hand, does not the Lord hold out his bleeding hands, and say, Behold how I have loved you? does He not lovingly enquire, Have ye such proofs of love abounding on every side of you, and yet, because one thing is not as you had wished, will you begin to question my regard? Oh! happy they, who, like Eli, bow to the dispensations of God, saying, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good!"* and, like Job, under the bitterest of bereavements can exclaim, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"†

If the Enemy can but gain an entrance into the mind for any of these questionings, he will not be slow in plying the soul of the Christian with suggestions—

3. Upon the hardship of being debarred from many things which the world enjoys, and the difficulties of a life of self-denial, watchfulness, and prayer. Thus it was that he suggested to our

* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

† Job i. 21.

first parent, that though she might eat freely of every tree of the garden, there was something in *this* tree especially to be desired; and thus it was that he tempted her to look upon the tree, and see that it was pleasant to look upon, and good for food, and a tree to be desired to make one wise. And will any question whether the soul of the believer can be exposed now to temptations such as this, when he sees that even the Christian's Lord was tempted by an offer of the world's wealth and glory, if only he would do homage for them to the Spirit of Evil? Foiled as the Devil was in this attempt, he will not often try the soul of an enlightened Christian with temptations to rush headlong into the world's vanities; but he will insinuate doubts as to the necessity of being entirely separate from the world; he will suggest questions as to the desirableness of a little more mingling with the society of the world; he will urge the propriety of relaxing a little of that strictness which makes religion repulsive; he will even tempt one to think that there is a needless severity in so much watchfulness against temptation, a needless diligence in so much prayer and meditation, a needless earnestness in so striving to have the conversation in heaven. Alas for those, who give a moment's harbor to such suggestions! They are opening a door, which will let in

matter for many an hour of bitter repentance ; if they be not even yielding themselves up to the snare of the Devil, to be led captive by him at his will.

III. But we proposed to consider, in the third place, THE SPECIAL DANGER which the apostle apprehended for the Corinthians, and AGAINST WHICH IT IS CONTINUALLY NECESSARY TO GUARD THE CHRISTIAN'S SOUL. "I fear," he saith, "lest your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

1. By "the simplicity that is in Christ," we shall perceive to be meant, first, *the simplicity of faith in Him and dependance upon Him, as the only ground of the sinner's justification in the sight of God*. There were false teachers crept in among the Corinthians, who, like the subtle serpent, did not attempt openly to assail the foundations of the Christian's faith, but to urge the mingling up of other things, such as the ceremonies of the Jewish ritual, as the ground of dependance. And can any doubt, that, in the present day, the great effort which the enemy of souls has put forth is marked, not by a direct assault upon the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, not by an open denial of the great doctrine of justification by faith only, but by the suggestion to mingle up some other grounds of

dependence with the simple one of the finished work of Christ. Be the addition what it may, whether ceremony or sacrament, whether prayer or alms, whether self-denial or good-works, if anything can be added to the grounds of the soul's salvation, the Enemy's point is gained. He cares not how large a part the work of Christ may form in the grounds of the soul's confidence, so that it be not the whole and only ground. The simplicity which is in Christ teaches on this wise: "Whosoever believeth in Jesus shall not perish, but have everlasting life."* "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."† "All that believe are justified from all things."‡ "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."§ "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."|| "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."¶ How many carnal reasonings are opposed to this simple truth! How many proud thoughts rise against accepting salvation as thus a free gift in Christ Jesus! How open is even the believer's soul to the suggestion, that there is something in his prayers, his alms, his self-denial, or his diligence,

* John iii. 17

† Acts xvi. 31.

‡ Acts xiii. 39.

§ Rom. iii. 28.

|| Rom. iv. 5.

¶ Rom. v. 1.

which commends him, for Christ's sake, to the Father! Yet how great the danger, how fearful the peril they incur, who allow any one thing to be mingled up, in however faint a manner, with His work, who trod the winepress alone, and will give no portion of his honor to another!

2. By "the simplicity that is in Christ" is meant, secondly, *the consistency of the Christian's walk* as a follower of the Lord Jesus. St. Paul appeals to the Corinthians to bear him witness, how "in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had had his conversation in the world."* And surely a leading feature in the walk of his Master and ours was the simplicity that marked Him in all His intercourse with the generation amid which He walked. How often is the Christian tempted rather to be conformed to this world! How often tempted to take for his guide the maxims and opinions of the world, instead of the simple inquiry, What saith the Lord? How often tempted to consider what the world expects of him, rather than simply to ask, Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do? How often tempted rather to walk *as* others walk, than to follow Christ fully, and walk even as He walked! And yet, though his obedience to the word, and his imitation of the example of Christ form no

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

part of the grounds of his dependance, what Christian can without peril of his soul neglect one precept of the Saviour, and forsake in the minutest particular the following of His steps? The true Christian is not more remarkable for the simplicity of his dependance upon Christ as the sole foundation of his hopes, than he is for the earnestness of his desire and diligence of his endeavor to be in all things conformed to His image, in all things to be guided by His will. What cause has he then for watchfulness over himself, lest in anything he be conformed to the spirit of the world, and forsake the lovely pattern which his Lord has left! What simplicity of purpose, what singleness of eye, what earnestness of affection, what devotion of heart should be manifested by a soul, conscious of such engagements to the Saviour, and anticipating such happiness in Him! O! who can truly realize that he has a portion in Christ Jesus, that he is a "member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones,"* and not aim to be daily more and more like Him, and more and more prepared for His coming!

Dearly beloved, the minister of God in every age, whose heart is in his work, must share, in some measure at least, the anxieties which St. Paul experienced with regard to the souls among

* Eph. v. 30.

whom he went preaching the Gospel of the grace of God. And can we think of you, and of the charge committed to us to watch for your souls, and not earnestly and anxiously inquire whether ye have truly come and joined yourselves to Christ? How many are there of you, who yet know Him not; who bear His name, but have no interest in His work; who call yourselves Christians, but have no love for the Saviour! Beloved, the Lord still waiteth to be gracious; He yet invites, He yet pleads with you to come: but beware! His "Spirit shall not always strive with man;"* beware, lest ye provoke Him to swear in His wrath, that ye shall not enter into His rest!

Earnestly, beloved, and anxiously would we plead with you, who have come and taken upon you the yoke of Christ, to take heed, lest, by any unwatchfulness of yours, Satan gain an advantage over you. Ye are "not ignorant of his devices."† His craft is to lead you to a questioning, or murmuring, or worldly spirit, knowing that, if once ye harbor these, ye will fall an easy prey to his assaults. Be watchful then, beloved, "be sober, be vigilant."‡ Watch especially over your affections; guard well the avenues of the heart. It is the heart the Lord Jesus asks for; and the costliest service, without

* Gen. vi. 3.

† 2 Cor. ii. 2.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 8.

the heart's affections, were abomination in His sight. Beware, then, lest any man spoil you by the traditions of men, which are not after Christ; beware lest Satan ensnare you by the subtilties of a false faith! "Ye are complete in Him, who is the Head."* Hold on to Him, and ye shall be safe.

Earnestly, beloved, and anxiously would we urge on you a sense of your privileges in being espoused to the Lord Jesus. Though ye are black, in yourselves, yet are ye comely,† through the comeliness which He puts upon you. The life of our first parents was entrusted to their own keeping, and they lost it; yours is in the keeping of Christ,‡ and it is safe. How should this belief make you watchful over yourselves; how should this hope lead you to purify yourselves, even as He is pure!§ How should ye "set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth! For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."|| Who can believe this, and not "give diligence to be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless?"¶

* Col. ii. 10. † Cant. i. 5. ‡ Col. iii. 3. § 1 John iii. 3.
|| Col. iii. 4. ¶ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

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SERMON IV.

THEY FOLLOWED HIM.

ST. MARK I. 18.

And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed Him.

As in the kingdom of nature, so in the kingdom of grace, there is a resemblance in the main features of the various phænomena which abound in them, whatever variety may exist in the details. The whirlwind, the earthquake, the storm, the fire, however different may be the circumstances by which each may be attended, and the scene in which it may act, are yet, in their leading characteristics, everywhere the same. And as "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." * There may be

* John iii. 8.

different circumstances attending each conversion of a soul to God. The conviction of sin may be stirred up by different occurrences in one case and in another. The call of grace may have fallen upon the ear, and been brought home to the heart, through various channels. One weapon may have brought down the strong holds, behind which one sheltered himself, and another have demolished the refuges of another. Yet still, as regards the essential marks of conviction of sin, of the call of grace, of the conversion of the heart, there is a resemblance pervading those phenomena in the kingdom of grace, wherever they may be traced.

And, on this account, while there is so vast a difference in the situation and circumstances of mankind, so great a variety of tastes and habits, of professions and pursuits, of tempers and inclinations, of temptations and trials, distinguishing one man from another, it will be found, that the various cases, which occur from time to time, of the conversion of the heart to God present some leading trait of general resemblance. "As in water face answereth to face," so, in the mirror of the truth of God, the heart of man corresponds with that of his fellow-man, in the leading characteristics.*

When, then, we find instances recorded in the

* Prov. xxvii. 19.

blessed Book, of the call addressed by the Word of Jesus to the sinner's heart, and of the effect which graciously accompanied the call, in bringing the sinner to His feet, we may be sure that there is something in the narrative which, independantly of the peculiar circumstances it details, is calculated to convey instruction, suited to every age and every condition of mankind. Because the first persons, to whom the word that fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus was made effectual, were called to be His apostles, we may not thence imagine that their call has no lesson for us. Because the grace, that acted upon their minds and hearts, was such as fitted them for the arduous work to which they were especially called, and strengthened them for the peculiar trials by which their path was pre-eminently beset, we may not thence conclude, that similar operations of divine grace are not, according to the occasion, to be looked for in ourselves. The call *to be Apostles* was peculiar; the call *to be Christians* is as applicable to every one that should believe through their word, as to them. The grace that qualified them for the apostolic office was extraordinary; the grace that disposed them to give up all for Christ, and strengthened them to take up their cross daily and follow Him, is the same that, in the case of every true child of God, turns him

from his ungodliness, converts his soul, and makes him a new creature in Christ Jesus.

We may take, then, such a case as that to which the text refers,—the call of the two first that the Lord Jesus numbered among His personal attendants,—and gather from its consideration, if the Lord vouchsafe to bless it, some material for the edification of our souls. Beloved, let us intreat that blessing, and pray the Lord so to sanctify our present meditations to our souls' good, that we may be led, each of us, to examine whether we have yet heeded the call which the Lord addresses to our hearts, whether we have yet left all, and followed Jesus.

The particulars of the call of the two disciples, to whom the text refers, are given by St. Matthew and St. Mark in nearly the same simple terms. Shortly after the Lord Jesus commenced His ministry, "preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God," "as He walked by the sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed Him."*

I. In endeavouring to apply this call to our

* Mark i. 16—18.

own improvement, let us consider, in the first place, beloved, THE CHARACTER AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PERSONS CALLED.

1. And, first, we perceive them to be UNLEARNED AND IGNORANT MEN. This was frequently charged upon them by the Scribes and Pharisees of their day, in order to deprive their teaching and their example of what little influence they might have had among the people. Yet this same feature of their character constrained those, who, in after days, witnessed their boldness in danger, their readiness against argument, and their firmness against threats, to "take knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus,"* and had imbibed His spirit, and were sustained by His strength.

It may be feared that too often, in the present day, the appeals of the Gospel, urging the conversion of the heart to God, are put aside by a remark upon the generally simple character and low worldly attainments of those that profess to feel the need of thus giving themselves to God. Often do we hear it said, that the appeals of the Gospel, calling for the renunciation of the world, and the devotion of body and soul to the service of Christ, may do well enough for the excitable temperaments and unsettled judgments of the young, or for the tender sensibilities and nervous

* Acts iv. 13.

fancies of the female mind ; but that you will not find strong-minded men, the learned, or the worldly-wise, so easily drawn away by these notions. Strange commentary this upon the Apostle's assurance, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."* Be it so, then, beloved, that the large proportion of those that truly give themselves up to the following of Jesus, are simple-minded, and, in the world's account, fools; how much better will it have been to cast in our lot with them, and to "become fools that we may be wise,"† than to go on boasting of our wisdom, until "our feet stumble upon the dark mountains,"‡ and our light goes out for ever!

2. Secondly, we perceive the persons referred to in the text to be **NEEDY MEN**. They were truly dependant upon their daily exertions for their daily bread, and had seemingly no other means, than those which the labor of their hands afforded, for the supply of those that looked to them for support. Yet He who calls them "has not where to lay His head."§ He

* 1 Cor. i. 26, 27. † 2 Cor. iii. 18. ‡ Jer. xiii. 16.
§ Luke ix. 58.

holds out to them no temporal inducements, promises them no worldly ease, offers them no present enjoyment, to draw them to His service, but makes it plain to them, at the very outset, that they must encounter poverty, privation, want.

There are many, who are willing to put themselves in the same class with these disciples, to declare that they are needy, and living as it were from hand to mouth, upon the fruit of their daily toil, who yet urge these worldly circumstances rather as an excuse for putting away from them, for the present at least, the call of the blessed Jesus. How often may we hear it urged that, if there be such a renouncing of the world, such a mortification of the flesh, such a following of Christ necessary to constitute the true Christian, such a Gospel will not do for the men of business, at least for those who are dependant upon their business for their bread! Yet our Saviour, by addressing His call in the first place to such men as those of the text, would seem to teach, that there was something in their condition, for which His Gospel was specially adapted; and, for their comfort, He has annexed a promise to His call, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."* Perhaps not superfluities, perhaps not wealth;

* Matt. vi. 33.

but those things, of which your heavenly Father seeth that ye have need. It may be, however, that the call of Christ is a call to choose between His service with poverty, and the service of the world with wealth. Let the conduct of the two disciples show you, beloved, how the grace of God should lead you to decide.

3. The persons referred to were MORAL MEN. Such, at least, is the impression which we should gather from the little that is told us concerning them. Yet their morality did not exempt them from the necessity of coming to Jesus, and following Him. Nay, even after He had called them, and they had joined themselves to Him, lest they should think that an outward adherence to Him was all that was necessary, He said to them, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* And there are other cases in the New Testament Scriptures, and none more striking than that of Cornelius the centurion, which show us, that no moral excellence, no exactness in living up to the profession that one makes, will answer instead of coming to Christ by a simple and lively faith in Him. And it is not unfrequently suggested as a difficulty now in the way of the requirements of the Gospel, that there are persons, who are amiable and excellent in every

* Matt. xviii. 3.

relation of life, but who yet have never felt the need of being converted to God, nor experienced any change of heart ; and the question is triumphantly asked, Will not these be saved ? Will such as these be cast out at last because they have not been what is called converted ? Yet both the doctrine and the example of the New Testament show us the necessity, in any and in every case, of coming to Jesus, and taking up his cross, and following Him ; and reveal to us no other way, by which a soul can enter heaven, than through a lively faith in Jesus. The charge of uncharitableness will be often brought against those that insist upon the necessity of a change of heart in all that would be saved ; but take heed, beloved, lest ye include in this charge even Him who has said, " Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

II. Let us consider, in the second place, THE NATURE OF THE CALL, which was addressed by our Lord Jesus to the disciples referred to in the text.

1. And it was, first, A PERSONAL CALL. It was addressed to Andrew and Peter, and meant expressly for them. And, beloved, not less personal is the call, addressed by the Gospel of

* John iii. 3.

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Christ Jesus, to the heart of every individual sinner that has a soul to be saved. There is, indeed, too generally found an unhappy facility of putting away from ourselves the call of the Gospel, and of either escaping their force by the remark, how much we all need to be more religious than we are, or of evading their application by discovering their exact suitability to some of our neighbors. "Yes, there are many, for whom it would indeed be well that they should forsake their sins, and be converted to God; but it cannot be necessary for us!" But, beloved, the call of the Gospel is a direct and personal call to every one of you. To thee—and to thee—and to thee,—to you, beloved, and to me, is the call addressed by our blessed Lord, Follow me! It will avail you nothing in the day of the Lord, to plead that you have gone with the multitude, and have done as others did. The question will be, Have you heeded the call of Jesus: have you come and followed Him?

2. It was, secondly, A DISTINCT CALL—a call to follow Jesus. It was no confused sound that struck upon the ear; no voice from the clouds, no impression upon their fancy, that they were called to obey. There stood the Lord Jesus by the sea-side; in Him, as we may gather from St. John's Gospel,* they recognised One, to

* John i. 35—42.

whom their attention had been already called, as "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world," and heard Him distinctly address to them the call, Follow me ! And surely, beloved, not less distinct is the call which the Lord Jesus addresses to your hearts. He stands not, indeed, by His bodily presence in the midst of you ; but by the voice of His providence, by the ministry of His grace, He appeals to your souls. Is not the touch of sickness ; is not the stroke of bereavement ; is not the pressure of affliction ; is not the changing season ; is not the disappointment of our earthly hopes ; is not the lapse of years ; is not the approach of age ;—are not these things, in one case and another, loud and distinct calls from the Lord Jesus, Follow me ! Is not the profession of your baptism ; is not the free access to the Bible ; is not the frequency of the preached Word ; is not the commemoration of the dying love of Christ ;—are not all and each of these a distinct call from the Lord Jesus Himself, Follow me ! O yes ! however ye may put away the call, there can be none of you so dull, as not to hear, in the various providences and means of grace around you, the call to follow Christ.

3. And this is, thirdly, AN INTELLIGIBLE CALL. In the case of the disciples of the text, it left no doubt upon their minds of its meaning ; no

question as to the nature of the duty to which it called them. And this call is equally intelligible now, however men may try to cover their neglect of it by referring to the difference of their circumstances from those of the apostles in the text. Ye are not called upon, as they were, to forsake your worldly calling; but as their worldly calling, if they had clung to it in preference to the Saviour, would have been sin, and have caused their ruin, so there may be many things, in themselves as innocent as their fishing, which yet, coming between you and the Saviour, and keeping you away from Him, become sin to you, and tend to your destruction. Now, there can be few, if any, so dull as not to know what there is in their lives that they would not like the Lord Jesus to be privy to; what there is about them, that must be changed before they could be fit to dwell with God. The call to follow Jesus is a call to renounce the spirit of the world, its vanities and follies, its principles and maxims, its joys and pleasures, as being contrary to the mind and spirit of Christ, and utterly unsuited to the enjoyment of His Kingdom. And there can be few so dull as not to perceive, that there is a great difference between looking to Christ alone for salvation, and trusting to ourselves; between the most scrupulous observance of outward ceremonies, and the

religion of the heart ; between the scale of religion which satisfies the world, and that "holiness without which no man can see the Lord."* The call to follow Jesus is a call to give the heart to Him, to glory only in His cross, as the sole ground of justification, and, through faith in His cross, to crucify the world and the flesh, and to walk in newness and holiness of life. Beloved, is not this an intelligible call ? Do ye not understand it, if ye were only willing to apply it to yourselves ? O ! beware, then, how ye endeavour to put away its force, lest ye be speechless in the day when the Lord shall ask, "How camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment ?"†

4. In the case of the disciples of the text, this was, fourthly, AN EFFECTUAL CALL. By the power of the Holy Spirit accompanying the call, it was brought home to their hearts, and led them at once to comply with the Saviour's demand. It is to the power of the Spirit alone that this effect is to be ascribed. There was nothing in the word even of the Lord Jesus himself, that made His call peculiarly effectual ; else why was it that, of so many whom He called, so few became His followers ? There are instances expressly recorded, like that of the rich young man, who, though called, as

* Heb. xii. 14.

† Matt. xxii. 12.

these disciples had been, to forsake all and follow Christ, went away grieved. And, surely, these have been recorded in order to deprive the world of any age of the excuse, that, if they had heard the voice of the Lord Jesus himself, they would have believed. The same power of the Spirit was necessary to apply the word of the Lord Jesus himself, as that of the weakest, meanest of His instruments. The word of His weakest instrument, spoken in His name, is His word; and the same power, if sought, will bring it home, and make it a means of glorifying Christ by bringing the sinner to His feet. There are those who complain, perhaps sincerely, that the read and preached word produces so little effect upon their hearts. Beloved, do ye look for, do ye pray for, do ye wait for that power of the Spirit which, if really sought, will never be withheld, and whose promised effect it is to "take of the things of Christ and show them unto you?"*

III. In the case of the disciples we have remarked, the call was effectual: let us observe, in the third place, HOW ITS EFFECT WAS SHOWN.

1. It produced, first, AN IMMEDIATE ACQUIESCENCE. "*Straightway* they left their nets and followed Him." This was one great charm of

* John xvi. 11-17.

their obedience:—they obeyed at once. They did not plead, as some did, that they might wait till they had buried their father. They did not ask for indulgence, that they might go, bid them farewell that were at home.* Nothing was allowed to come between them and the Lord that called them. Straightway they followed him.

This was a great beauty in Abraham's obedience. Called as he was to a most painful duty, he "rose up early in the morning"† and set out. This was a lovely feature in the Psalmist's obedience. "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."‡ And, gracious as the Lord is, can we suppose it can be otherwise than provoking to Him, to see those, who can no longer escape the application of His calls to themselves, striving to bargain, as it were, with Him for a little longer delay: and, in the spirit of the sluggard, exclaiming, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep,"§ before we awake up and set out to serve thee. Nay, can we shut our eyes to the danger of delay? What are we, that we should be speaking of to-morrow, as a time for beginning to serve God? What is our leasehold of life, that we

* Luke ix. 59, 61. † Gen. xxii. 3. ‡ Ps. cxix. 60.

§ Prov. xxiv. 33.

should be putting off from day to day the vast interests of our souls? Beloved, the call of Christ is a present, it is an urgent call. Neglect it, turn away from it,—and it may never reach your ear again. “Behold! now is the accepted time, behold! now is the day of salvation.”* Make haste, then, and delay not to come and follow Christ.

2. The obedience, to which this call led the disciples, was, secondly, A CORDIAL AND UNRESERVED OBEDIENCE.” “*They left all, and followed Him.*” Not only was there no pleading for delay;—there was no remonstrance as to terms, no clinging to some old habit, no bargaining for some past indulgence: they left all and followed Him. And, beloved, though the Lord indeed waiteth to be gracious, and bears with all our backwardness, and hesitation, and delay, till at last ungodly man begins to think He will not execute His threatenings at all, yet He allows no compromise with regard to the fulness and completeness of the surrender of the heart to Him. “Give me thine heart,”† is His demand. A divided heart He will have none of. A partial and reserved obedience has no favour in His sight. And yet, in asking a cordial and entire obedience, He asks no more than ye, than every one of you, have pledged

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

† Prov. xxiii. 26.

yourselves to pay. To renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful passions and affections of the flesh; to cast off the yoke of the Devil, and renounce all words and works which bear his mark; and to keep God's holy will and commandments, not in the outward letter only, but in the inmost spirit;—this is what ye have promised; this is what ye must answer how ye have rendered to the Lord. Beloved, He may not be trifled with; He may not be mocked. Ye may try to persuade yourselves that ye have renounced the pomps and vanities of the world, while yet your hearts are set upon its trifling amusements and giddy joys; ye may try to believe that ye have renounced the flesh, while yet the chief object of your lives is mere self-indulgence: but think not, beloved, that ye can deceive Him, because your own hearts are willingly deceived. A change of heart, manifested in the renunciation of the world, and the hearty surrender of yourselves to the willing service of the Lord Jesus;—this is what the disciples in the text were called to; this is what the Lord demands of *you*, when He says to you, Follow me!

3. The call addressed to the disciples was an effectual call, in that it produced, thirdly, A CONTINUED OBEDIENCE. “They *followed* Him.”

Theirs was not a sudden burst, like that of the scribe, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God;"* but who would take no pains to seek an entrance there. Theirs was not a mere hasty profession, like his who exclaimed, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever thou goest!"† but who does not appear to have followed Him at all. No; they went after Jesus; and though, doubtless, He had much to bear with from their petulance, and inconsistencies, and remaining worldliness, still they appear to have adhered stedfastly to Him. And, beloved, the only way in which the call of the Gospel is proved to be an effectual call, is the continuance of the disciple in the path of godliness. We sometimes, alas! see those, who, while the call of providence or of grace is sounding in their ears, profess themselves ready to follow Christ, as soon as danger passes away, or the pressure of sickness or calamity is removed, giving themselves up again to the world. We sometimes, alas! see those, who for a time seemed to run well, going back again to the beggarly elements of the world, and forgetting the professions they had made. Here, then, we have no evidence, that the Spirit of the Lord had been really at work. "If ye continue in

* Luke xiv. 15.

† Luke ix. 57.

my word," saith the Lord Jesus, "then are ye my disciples indeed."* There may be, alas! many short-comings, many inconsistencies; the Lord may have much to bear with in the coldness, the petulance, the worldliness, even of His disciples;—but they that are such indeed, still cling to Him, and make it the great desire and purpose of their lives to follow Him.

Dearly beloved, wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, there He is in the midst.† He is here then, beloved, among you, just as surely as He stood by the sea side, when Andrew and Peter were in the ship; and, by the voice of His preached word addresses to you, just as truly as by His living voice He addressed to them, the call to follow Him. Can it be as truly said of you, Ye have forsaken all, and followed Him?

What say ye, beloved, who are just in the morning of your days, with the world and its temptations enticing you, and your own hearts pleading for indulgence; have ye heeded the Lord's call, renounced the world, and set out to follow Christ? My dear young friends, the gracious Saviour pleads with you by His dying love, not to reject His mercies, and for the sake of the world's vanities, to cast off His

* John viii. 31.

† Matt. xviii. 20.

claims upon your hearts. O! sow not anguish and despair against a dying hour, by now neglecting His call of love; and provoke Him not to treasure up for you against the day of wrath, the echo of your own reply to Him, "Depart from me, I know you not."

How is it with you, beloved, who are engaged in the very thick of the business and traffic of the world; how do ye act upon the spirit of the call to come and follow Jesus? Ye are not called upon to forsake any worldly calling, which is not in itself sinful; but there are few, if any worldly callings, in which there are not abundant temptations to sin. Do ye, in these cases, show, that ye are determined to follow Christ? Is gain less precious to you than godliness? Are prayer, and the Sabbath-day, and the reading of the Scriptures more prized, than the opportunities of worldly increase? Is heaven a dearer object of pursuit than wealth? Be honest with yourselves, beloved, that ye may know whether ye are following Christ, or no.

And what will ye answer, beloved, whose hearts are engrossed by the affections and ties of earth? Have ye renounced these, and followed Christ? The ties of natural kindred were designed by the Lord to twine closely round the heart; and yet he cannot be a disciple of Jesus

who does not hate all the dearest objects of affection, in comparison with his love for Christ.* When one of the martyrs was at the stake, and the flames were just about to be enkindled, his wife and children were brought before him to induce him to recant, and he was asked, if he did not love them. "Love them," he exclaimed, "Yes! If all the world were gold, and at my disposal, I would gladly give it for the sake of living with them, even in a prison; but in comparison with Christ, I love them not." Beloved, there may be no scene of martyrdom to try you; but how do ye show your love for Jesus, when He tries you by the strokes of His hand upon those dear to you? Is it by repining at the hardship of His thus dealing with you: or is it by the meek bowing of your will to His, Thy will be done? Beloved, there are few who can love their parents or their children more than God would have them love them; but when they come between your hearts and Christ himself, then are they idols, which endanger your salvation. O! pray for grace to give up all for Christ! O! beware, lest He say of you, They are joined to their idols, let them alone!†

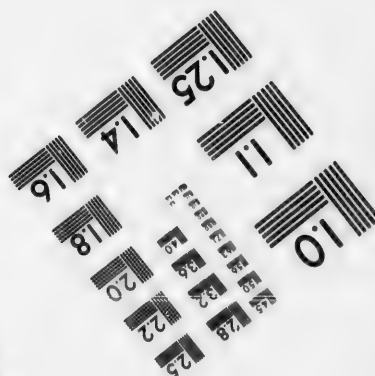
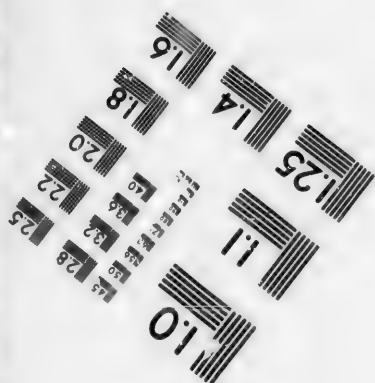
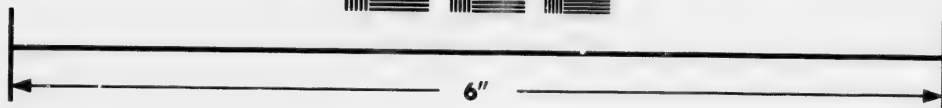
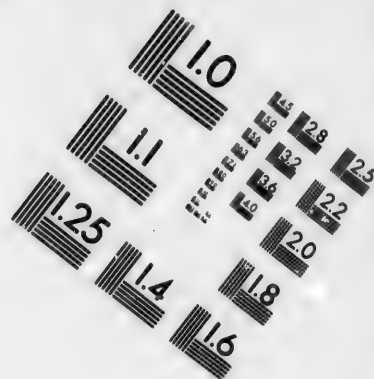
Dearly beloved, may the Lord Jesus accompany and apply His call to each one of your

* Luke xiv. 26.

† Hosea iv. 17.

hearts; that He may have this record concerning you written in the book of His remembrance, "Straightway they forsook all, and followed Him!"





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SERMON V.

SINS FORGIVEN.

ST. LUKE V. 20.

And when He saw their faith, He said, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

“BLESSED are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” *

So sang the Psalmist in old time, as, surrounded with every thing that could gratify ambition, or minister to luxury, or please the fancy, or indulge the taste, he felt and he exclaimed, that there was no happiness to be compared with his, who is at peace with God: that there is no true blessedness but his, whose sins are pardoned, whose iniquity is forgiven.

And so, in later times, hath an apostle taken

* Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; Rom. iv. 7, 8.

up the strain; and, as he traced with a pencil of light the path which only leads to pardon and to peace with God, joined in proclaiming *him* the only happy being, who has found this peace,—in pronouncing *him* alone truly blessed that hath laid his sins on Jesus, and received the assurance of forgiveness at His hands.

And the heart of man in every age hath borne witness to the truth of this announcement. Whether it be that the soul is so immersed in the cares and pleasures of the world, that scarce a passing thought can be bestowed upon the vast concerns of eternity; or, on the other hand, the heart be given up to the pursuit of that better portion, which shall satisfy its largest desires throughout the longest hour of its immortality; the passing thought in one case, the devotion of the heart in the other, admit the blessedness of those “that know the joyful sound”* of pardon and of peace. There is a worm at the root of the world’s happiness, which dooms its hapless votary to disappointment, even in the moment of anticipated joy; there is a blight over the brightest prospect of human enjoyment, that is lighted up only by the false glare of earthly pleasure; and that worm is the gnawing of an unsatisfied conscience, that blight, the consciousness of unfor-

* Psalm lxxxix. 15.

given sin, for which an answer must be given at the great day of account. There is a peace which passeth understanding, which often calms and cheers the soul, whose earthly lot is one of misery and distress: there is a joy, with which the stranger intermeddleth not, which no worldly pleasure can impart, no worldly trouble take away; and that joy arises from the sense of pardon and acceptance with God: that peace flows over the soul, when the burden of its sins has been removed, and the acquittance of its amazing debt been signed and sealed. Beloved! which testimony do your souls bear to the precious truth? Is it the witness of a heart laboring to satisfy itself with the things of earth, and flying from one pleasure to another in order to keep up the excitement in which alone your disappointment can be hushed; yet, still compelled reluctantly to admit, that there is a something yet unfound, an ingredient of happiness yet unattained, and without which ye are not at peace? Or is it the testimony, which the witness of God's Spirit ratifies and confirms, that ye have carried your sins to Jesus, have laid them upon Him, have heard His voice speaking pardon and peace, and are enjoying in your own souls the precious sense of God's reconciled countenance, the confidence of His favour, the assured hope of His glory? Surely,

there is a vast difference here! Which, dearly beloved, is your case?

These reflections seem naturally to arise from hearing the gracious answer, with which our Lord, as in the text, replied to the earnest application of a poor paralytic for relief. Helpless himself, unable to drag his palsied limbs along, and totter into the presence of the lowly Jesus, this poor creature was carried by his friends when the crowd, that thronged the doors without, marked out the house where Jesus was. Yet even when arrived there, he seemed little nearer the attainment of his hopes: for the multitude crowded so around the door, some, selfish in their sorrows, pressing on to gain the eye of Jesus, some, eager in their curiosity, elbowing their way to the immediate scene of the wonders which He wrought, that there seemed no prospect and no possibility of gaining access for this poor paralytic and his couch. Yet his faithful friends were not inclined so easily to give up hope. A thought strikes them; and, as if despairing of reaching the presence of Jesus, they enter a neighboring dwelling, as if for a few moments' rest. They bear their helpless load to the top of the house, and, hurrying him along the flat roofs which in those countries joined house to house, and were places both of occasional retirement and of

public resort, until they came over where Jesus was, they began to remove the tiling, and, lowering him down into the midst of the assembled crowd, laid him at the feet of Jesus. The Lord saw in this act a proof of their persuasion of His power, their confidence in His willingness, their trust in His benevolence and love: and, His heart overflowing with a richer blessing than was His wont to bestow upon those who thronged Him for a cure, He said to him at once, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." But there were Scribes and Pharisees sitting by: and, though they saw one and another helpless being crawl before Him to entreat His help, and beheld Him touch the blind eyes of one and give him sight, and heard Him speak to the dull ears of another, and give him hearing, and thought not of charging Him with blasphemy, however much they envied Him this exercise of godlike power: yet no sooner does He put forth another attribute of God, and proclaim pardon to a guilty soul, than they accuse him in their hearts of blasphemy against God. Strange, that it was no blasphemy to open the blind eyes, and bid the deaf ears hear; strange, that it was no blasphemy to listen to the loathsome leper's prayer, and by the word, "I will," to make him clean: strange, that it was no blasphemy to touch the helpless cripple's palsied hand, and

by the touch to send the vigour of renewed youth vibrating through the frame; and yet, when a word, requiring no greater power to make it good,—when a word, which made known the very purpose for which He who uttered it had come,—when a word, whose object it was to confer that healing on the soul, which none but God could have bestowed by a word upon the body;—when such a word was spoken, forthwith the charge of blasphemy was raised. Yet, well was it for the poor paralytic that it was so. The evil of the Scribes' and Pharisees' wicked charge was over-ruled for good to him. For the same voice, that had spoken pardon to his sinful soul, again utters its word of power: his palsied limbs are strengthened; he rises a new man in body and in soul, and goes his way glorifying God.

“Thy sins are forgiven thee!” O! what a message of grace and love was this to that poor decrepid creature. It may be, that he could trace his sickness to some course of sin, in which the vigor of his youth had been wasted, and his strength consumed. It may be, that, as he lay upon his couch of helplessness, and longed to be as he had once been, the thought of his sinfulness had rushed upon him, and he had written bitter things against himself, and dreaded lest the weakness of his bed of suf-

fering must be ere long exchanged for the pit of everlasting anguish and despair. What joy then must it have been to such a being to hear the glad tidings of forgiveness and of peace. What transport must have filled his soul, when he listened to the sweet assurance, that the sin, which had so pressed upon his conscience, was removed, and should be remembered against him no more for ever. Surely it could have mattered little to him, that his body should remain upon its couch of suffering, since now his soul was reconciled and at peace with God. Yes! surely now he must have felt it would be better to die than live, lest he should lose his present enjoyment, and he was ready to take up the words of the aged Simeon, and say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."* Who is there, that hath known in his own soul the blessedness of forgiveness, that hath felt the precious stream of peace and joy flow over his heart, as first he realized the truth that he was a pardoned and saved sinner, and cannot enter into this poor cripple's joy, as the announcement of his sins forgiven fell upon his delighted ear? The worldly in their carelessness and unconcern may think little of this blessing, and imagine that they would far prefer to have their pains re-

* Luke ii. 29, 30.

moved, their sorrows cheered, their wants supplied, than hear the most gracious message of forgiveness; but there is no one, that has known the burden of his sins, and felt the pressure of unpardoned guilt upon his conscience, who will not deem such a message as that of the text, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," the sweetest news that could strike a sinner's ear.

The consideration of this answer of the Lord Jesus to the implied request of those, that had let down this helpless paralytic through the roof, and laid him at His feet, may suggest to us, beloved, several important lessons, which, by the blessing of the Lord, may tend to our spiritual edification and improvement. Let us entreat His blessing, dearly beloved, while we endeavor to draw from this portion of His Word some nourishment for our souls, and pray that His Holy Spirit may be poured out upon us, convincing us all of sin, and leading us to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world."*

I. In the first place, we may gather from the words of the text an evidence of THE VALUE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER. We are told that when He saw *their faith*, the faith of those that

* John i. 29.

had taken such pains to bring their palsied friend, and lay him at His feet, He said to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven thee. Doubtless in this case there was, on the part of the sick man himself, a belief in the power and willingness of the Lord to heal him: but the great effort of faith seems to have been displayed by those who bore him to the Lord's presence; it was in answer rather to their believing exertion, that the Lord looked so graciously upon the cripple whom they brought before Him. And there are cases of a similar nature, and teaching the same lesson, recorded in the blessed book. It was in answer to the faithful prayer of the nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum, that the Lord gave the gracious message, "Go thy way; thy son liveth."* The woman who came out of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon cried after Jesus, not for herself, but for her darling child; and it was her daughter's health that rejoiced her heart, when she heard at last the gracious answer, "Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt."† And are not these things written for our learning, and designed to teach the followers of Jesus of every age, what a means they have of doing good to the bodies and the souls of those they love, in having access — access with boldness through the mediation of

* John iv. 50.

† Matt. xv. 28.

Jesus—into the presence of a reconciled Father, the God “that heareth prayer?”*

It is worthy of remark indeed, that in all the cases thus recorded, the faith of those who pleaded with the Lord Jesus on behalf of others, was put to peculiar trials, and manifested its strength in the most striking ways. The nobleman at Capernaum might almost have thought his request refused; yet still he continued to entreat. The Syrophenician woman followed on, though long He answered her not a word, and was willing to crouch at His feet like a dog, if only she might gather up the crumbs which His more favored people dropped. The very message of the centurion, that begged for his servant's cure, was such as to call forth the remark, “I have not found so great faith—no, not in Israel.”† And they, who brought this poor paralytic to be healed, persevered amid discouragements, and triumphed over obstacles, which would have turned many a one away. And so it is the effort of a strong faith, to bring the souls of those we love before the Lord, not in a mere formal way, but with a determination to persevere until He shall bless them and do them good, and to hold on amid discouragements, and to follow after, though He apparently answers not a word, pleading for the souls' salva-

* Ps. lxxv. 2.

† Luke vii. 9.

tion of those that yet know not Jesus. It is an act of faith, of strong faith, to come and plead with God *for our own souls*, and, while we confess our own utter vileness, still to entreat His blessing, His favor, His love. It is an effort of yet stronger faith to plead in earnest for the souls of those we love, and to persevere, though the Lord heareth not, in praying for His converting and saving grace to turn them from their sins, and bring them to His glory. Yet surely there is encouragement for such an effort given by the case of the text, encouragement to all who know the value of their own salvation to bring the souls of others in the arms of faith, and lay them at Jesus' feet. Surely there is encouragement here for the Christian parent to bring his little ones to Jesus, even while yet they know not, care not what he does, and entreat for them the Saviour's blessing. We would away with the idea, worthy of the dark age from which it sprung, that the mere administration of an outward ordinance can regenerate a child, and make it a new creature in Christ Jesus. Yet surely *they* may hope, who prayerfully and faithfully bring their child to an ordinance of Christ's appointment, and thus place it in His arms, and who follow on entreating for His blessing, though He appear not to hear or answer them, that, in His good time, the

child of many faithful prayers shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and hear the gracious Saviour's voice, Thy sins are forgiven thee. Surely there is encouragement here for the Christian relative or friend to bring those whom he loves upon the arms of faith, and lay them before Jesus. Often indeed will he be discouraged, and think, as he perceives those for whom he has pleaded going on as carelessly as ever, that his prayers have not reached the Saviour's ear; but still let him persevere, still, amid whatever discouragements, let him continue his entreaties for them, and his prayer shall not return to him without a blessing. Beloved, who are there of you that know the value of your souls, and the blessedness of pardon and of peace with God? Do ye carry those dear to you to Christ? Do ye plead for them, do ye "give Him no rest" until He bless them? They might ridicule your persuasions, and oppose your arguments, and cast back your entreaties with contempt; but they cannot check your prayers for them. O! do not ye check them, while yet their souls are within reach of mercy; cease not to pray for them, until at least they hear the voice of love, "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee!"

II. In the second place, the Saviour's gracious

words in the text would teach us, that THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS A PRESENT BLESSING. "He said unto the sick of the palsy, Man! thy sins are forgiven thee." He does not merely hold out the hope to him, that, at some future day, he may expect forgiveness: but He, who "hath power upon earth to forgive sins," declares to him the present, the immediate blotting out of all his sins, and his admission to the favor and the love of God. And in this case He gives us a practical example of the truth, which is again and again set forth as the doctrine of the Word of life, that "he that believeth in Jesus hath everlasting life;"* that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus:"† but that, "being justified by faith, they have peace with God,"‡ and "shall never come into condemnation, but are passed from death unto life."§ And yet, notwithstanding that this precious truth is thus set forth by precept and example in the blessed book, how slow are men to receive it. The utmost that many can profess is, that they hope they shall find mercy at the last: they seem to think it nothing less than presumption, to entertain a belief that our sins are already forgiven, and shall be remembered no more for ever. Yet surely this persuasion, if

* John iii. 36.

† Rom. viii. 1.

‡ Rom. v. 1.

§ John v. 24.

based upon a lively faith in the Word of Jesus, is no presumption. The voice of Jesus may not indeed be heard with the bodily ears, announcing the forgiveness of sins ; but His Word, His true and lively Word, points to the sacrifice of Jesus, as having been a complete and sufficient satisfaction for our sins, urges upon us, as the glad tidings which the Gospel brings, the news, that “ the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.”* I believe, then, in the forgiveness of my sins, as ye all, beloved, have professed this day to believe, not because of any voice I hear, of any fancied message to my own soul ; but because the only ground of forgiveness has been already laid, the atonement is completed, the acquittance sealed. The only way which is revealed for the forgiveness of sins is the shedding of the blood of Christ. That blood has been shed : and its “ one offering,” once offered, “ hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”† The Gospel then, beloved, invites you to believe, that your sins have been laid upon Christ, and are blotted out with His blood. It points you not to any fellow-creature, that ye may receive absolution at his hands ; it bids you not look out for any voice from heaven, to tell you that your name is written there ; but it calls upon you to “ behold the Lamb of God,” to

* Isa. liii. 6.

† Heb. x. 14.

behold Him slain for you, bearing your sins upon His bleeding head, blotting out your iniquities with His streaming blood; it tells you, that that sacrifice can never be repeated,* and that, if satisfaction for your sins has not yet been made, it never will be. It urges you then, beloved, to come; to come by faith to Jesus, to look upon His dying agonies, as your sins meet upon His head, and to hear His gracious voice saying to you, Your sins are forgiven you. Dear friends and fellow-sinners! have ye thus come to Jesus; have ye thus found the pardon of your sins; are ye at peace with God through Jesus Christ?

III. In the third place, the text suggests to us the idea, that THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS A BLESSING, OF WHICH THE PARDONED SINNER HAS A SWEET CONSCIOUSNESS IN HIS OWN HEART. The word of the Lord Jesus, "Man! thy sins are forgiven thee!" fell upon the eager ear of the poor palsied man; and can we believe, that it did not pour joy and peace over his believing soul? Could any one have charged him with presumption, who heard him express his confidence that his sins were blotted out? Could any one have taxed him with enthusiasm, who had heard him speak of the assurance which

* Heb. ix. 25—28; x. 10—26.

sustained his soul in peace, and cheered him with the sure and certain hope of everlasting joy? Surely as well might they have charged him with presumption, if they had heard him afterwards express his confidence, that his palsied frame was healed, when the Lord said to him, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." As well might they have charged him with enthusiasm, when they saw him make the effort to get up, and beheld him take up the couch upon which he so long had lain, and carry it through the midst. Did the voice, which spoke to him of *bodily healing*, send the glow of conscious health and vigour through his frame? And did not the voice, which spake to him of *sins forgiven*, send the sweet consciousness of peace with God throughout his sin-stricken soul? Surely he knew that his body was healed: did he not know also, that his sins were pardoned and his soul saved?

There are many, who, though they cannot question that in his case there was a consciousness of his forgiveness and acceptance, yet seem to doubt that in the present day there can be any such assurance. And yet, beloved, if this were so, would this not give an advantage to those who lived in our Lord's days over those of every other generation, which the Scriptures do not warrant our assigning them? Surely to such

a case as this our Saviour's words to Thomas may be applied, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."* Because this poor man heard the Lord's own voice assuring him that his sins were forgiven, he believed: blessed are they, who hear that same voice speaking in His holy Word, and believe it, and are at peace. That Word, the written Word, which testifies of Christ, speaks to the sinner of pardon and of peace, through his blood;† it invites us to come to Jesus, and find rest in Him;‡ it assures us that whosoever believeth in Jesus has everlasting life;§ can it then be presumption to act upon this invitation, and come to Christ; can it be presumption to believe that our sins have been laid upon Him, and blotted out in His blood, and through faith in Him, to look up to God as a Father and a Friend, and be at peace. Nay, beloved, I am persuaded that, however men may discuss the doctrine of assurance, there is no one who really thinks about his soul, that does not feel there can be no true peace without a consciousness of forgiveness and acceptance with God; and that does not deem those alone truly "blessed," who have this consciousness, that their "iniquity is forgiven, and

* John xx. 29.

† Eph. i. 14; Col. i. 20.

‡ Matt. xi. 28, 29.

§ John iii. 36.

their sin is covered."* I would urge on you, then, the enquiry, Have ye this peace with God? Have ye thus brought your sins to Jesus, and heard His gracious voice saying to you, Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you? If not, can ye be happy without it? Happy, while *knowing* that ye are sinners, and *not knowing* that your sins are forgiven? Happy, while unforgiven sin still lies upon your consciences, and, if it be not removed, must sink your souls into hell? Impossible! But if ye have heard and believed this gracious word, then how should ye glorify God; and "shew forth," in your whole lives and conversation, "the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light!"† Surely yours should be a cheerful, a happy, a rejoicing walk; while yet ye take good heed, that your rejoicing is "in the Lord,"‡ and your happiness such as is a foretaste of heaven.

IV. Once more. The text suggests to us, in the fourth place, a reflection upon THE ABOUNDING GRACIOUSNESS OF THE LORD, to whom the paralytic was brought for cure. He was brought to Him to seek the healing of his body; he found the health and salvation of his soul. He came to Him hoping that the Lord would by

* Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. † 1 Pet. ii. 9. ‡ Phil. iv. 4.

a word or touch relieve him of a disease, which, if it were not removed, must soon cease to affect him; he heard that word which announced to him the deliverance of his soul from that curse, which, if not removed, must have consigned him to the worm that dieth not, and the fire that never shall be quenched. And is not the grace he thus experienced a sample of the Lord's dealings with all that truly come to Him? Is He not "more ready to hear than we are to pray; and wont to give more than we either desire or deserve?"* How many a soul that is now rejoicing in the favor and the love of God, was led to utter its first cry to Jesus by the pressure of some bodily calamity from which it sought relief. How many a sinner, that perhaps had never bowed the knee to Jesus to ask him for the pardon of his sins, has been brought to his knees by some stroke of bereavement, or some anguish of disease; and has found the comfort that he looked not for, in hearing the voice of Jesus speaking to him of pardon and of peace. When Jacob was flying from his brother's face, and lay down desolate, friendless, and alone, beneath the canopy of heaven, he found a friend, "that sticketh closer than a brother,"† who unfolded to him the glorious

* Collect for the twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

† Prov. xviii. 24.

gates of a heavenly Father's home. When Hagar was flying from her angry mistress, and had wandered into the weary wilderness, she found the Lord whom yet she had not looked after, and received the promise of His grace, whom until then she had not sought. And thus has the Lord ever shown us that His dealings are all of grace; that "His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts."* How often has what seemed to be a misfortune, been thus turned into a blessing; how often has what was deemed a curse proved to be the highest good.

Beloved! it is such a Saviour as this that ye have to deal with; so gracious, so loving, so abundant in goodness and truth. Who is there among you, upon whom the Lord's afflictive hand has ever been laid, whom the Lord would not thus have drawn to His feet, and have gladly made the affliction a channel of the richest blessings, if ye would but come and receive them. Who is there, that has ever been really brought to his knees in faithful prayer to be delivered from the calamities that oppressed him, that has not found, in persevering in prayer, a blessing, not perhaps just such as he had asked, but richer and more precious far, enriching him with present peace, and giving him a foretaste

* Isa. lv. 8.

of eternal rest. The dealings and dispensations of God's providence, beloved, are all designed, whatever may be their character, to draw you as suppliants for His grace. How many of you, alas! allow them to pass by you unimproved, and confident in your own strength, will not go to Christ to help you bear them, and to sanctify them to you. How few of you, alas! are drawn by them to Him that healeth you, and wait at His feet for the gracious message, Your sins are forgiven you.

Yet, beloved, the same Jesus, whose voice once poured such unexpected peace and joy over the soul of the paralytic, now waiteth to be as gracious unto you. The same voice now speaketh in His holy word to every one that will but come to Him, saying to him, Thy sins be forgiven thee. Beloved, have ye ever heard that voice? Have ye ever received this precious message? Have ye ever appropriated these glad tidings, and taken them home, and fed your souls upon them? Surely, if not, it is because ye will not, and not because Jesus does not speak. But if so, then are ye blessed indeed. Ye may be suffering, ye may be afflicted, ye may be bereaved, yet are ye blessed; for "BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS IS FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SIN IS COVERED."

SERMON VI.

NOT ALONE.

ST. JOHN XVI. 32.

*And yet I am not alone, because the Father is
with me.*

"It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect though sufferings." * The only respect in which anything could be added to the perfection of Jesus, was in His qualifications to be the Advocate, the Intercessor, and the Friend of sinners. As their Atonement, their Substitute, their Surety, He was, in His own Divine nature, perfect and complete. Nothing could be added to the perfection of *HIS NATURE*, who, being alone without sin, "suffered for sins," and died, "the just for the unjust, that

* Heb. ii. 10.

He might bring us to God."* But it was necessary, to complete the character of our Advocate and sympathizing Friend, that He should *by experience* have learnt how to feel for the suffering, and, *by having* "*Himself suffered* being tempted," should know how to minister consolation and support to those that are tried.†

Perfect as the Redeemer was, His heart must have overflowed with tenderest feeling, and His soul have been filled with the deepest compassion for perishing sinners. But we know, that it is not merely a feeling heart which is necessary to qualify one for ministering consolation to the cast down and afflicted; that it requires some acquaintance with suffering, some personal discipline in the school of trial, some practical experience of the preciousness of those consolations which abound in the Gospel, to fit the most tenderhearted for success in gaining the confidence of the afflicted, and pouring comfort into their wounds. In this it was that the sufferings of Jesus contributed to His perfection as the Mediator and High Priest of His people; they gave Him an experimental acquaintance with the bitterness of the anguish, to which from various sources our frail nature is exposed; and by having drawn, Himself, from the rich fountain of comfort contained in the promises of God, He

* 1 Pet. iii. 18.

† Heb. ii. 18.

learnt how to supply the same cordial to the weary, the fainting, or the tried.

In the accomplishment, then, of this great and gracious purpose of his coming, the Lord Jesus appears to have partaken, to the full extent, of all those weaknesses and sensibilities of our nature, with which no sin was mingled, but which laid Him open to the varied assaults of temptation, the various approaches of trial, of suffering, and of sorrow. In every form in which temptation could assail Him, in which distress could break upon Him, or poverty and privation bow His spirit down, He met, endured, and overcame the assault; and there can be no circumstances through which the believer in Jesus is called to pass, in which he will not find that the Captain of his salvation has led the way, and has learnt by His own experience to succor the distressed.

The most casual glance at the life of the blessed Jesus is sufficient to convince any one, that He experienced to the full every species of *bodily privation, suffering, and distress*, to which He could have been exposed. A more careful view of His character will enable us also to perceive, that His sensibilities were such, that He endured also, in its severest pressure, every variety of *mental suffering*, by which any of our fallen race can be bowed down. View Him

weeping at the grave of Lazarus, and see how, even though He knew He was about to recall the departed from the tomb, He yet felt for the sorrows of those who mourned him lost; hear Him groaning in spirit on the same occasion, as the Jews enquired among themselves why He did not prevent His friend's decease, and see what mental agony He suffered under those suspicions of unkindness, which His next act was about so triumphantly to remove.* Observe Him, as He communicates to His disciples His knowledge of the awful fact that one of them was about to betray Him; and see if ever the spirit of man was more bruised by the thought of a friend's, a companion's, a brother's treachery, than His was;† hear Him as He remonstrates with the three peculiarly favored ones, whom He had charged to guard His privacy in the garden, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?"‡ and judge if He felt not bitterly the coldness and want of interest in His welfare thus manifested by His chosen friends; see Him, as, surrounded by the mockeries, and assailed by the blows of His persecutors,§ "He looked, and there was none to help, and He wondered that there was none to uphold;"|| and ask, if He felt not then, as any the

* John xi. 35—45. † John xiii. 21. ‡ Matt. xxvi. 40.

§ Ibid. 67, 68.

|| Isaiah lxiii. 5.

most desolate creature could have felt, the bitterness of their desertion who, in the hour of trial, had all forsaken Him and fled.* Divine as He was, He was also entirely human: He had human sensibilities of the most exquisite nature; He partook of human feelings in their deepest experience; and every circumstance in His tried career, which could have been supposed capable of wounding the feelings, and bruising the spirit of any one endowed with the most tender sensibilities, bore with its fullest force upon His gentle soul.

It is this circumstance, which gives such impressiveness to His example in the various conditions of trial through which His followers may have to pass. If He *suffered not*, being tempted; if His Divine nature raised Him above the sensibilities of His human nature, then His conduct could not be urged as a pattern to those that have such different feelings. But if He endured all the mental suffering which poverty, or reproach, or treachery, or insult, or desertion, or violence can inflict upon a sensitive spirit, then may His conduct under those varied trials be indeed an example to all, who profess to have taken up their cross to follow Him.

It is this circumstance, also, which gives such peculiar preciousness to the compassion and sympathy of Jesus. If He endured no pain under

* Mark xiv. 50.

the various taunts and reproaches, the privations and sufferings, the treachery and desertion, the contradiction and persecution, which He encountered, how then could He truly enter into their feelings, upon whose spirits these things bear with such a heavy pressure? But if these things inflicted the severest anguish upon Him, then what tried, or tempted, or suffering believer can there be, that may not feel, in listening to the consolations which the Word of Jesus offers, that he is listening to the sympathizing tones of one, who knows what sore temptations mean, for He has felt the same, and who can have compassion on the tried, the fainting, and the weary, since He "himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." *

These remarks may lead us to perceive how sweet as an example, and how precious as a consolation, is the assurance of the Lord Jesus in the text. The circumstances under which the words were uttered, may seem indeed peculiar to the Saviour; for none could ever be called upon to endure a desertion just such as He experienced; but the feelings under which they were uttered, are of a more general nature, and the consolation which they suggest may be extended to various circumstances, in which the followers of Jesus may be placed. It is with

* Matt. viii. 17.

the view of deriving from them that consolation and instruction, which they are calculated to afford to us, that I would now invite your attention to them, dearly beloved; and would pray that the teaching and blessing of the Holy Spirit may apply and sanctify their lessons to our hearts.

In approaching the contemplation of that comfort, by which the soul of the Redeemer was sustained in the anticipation of the unheard-of woes through which He was about to pass, and in endeavoring to apply it to our own edification, we are led to observe, first, the nature of the consolation itself, which supported Him, and, secondly, the circumstances, under which this comfort was enjoyed. Surrounded, on the last occasion on which He would be so attended before His death, by the chosen companions of His ministry, and pouring out His soul to them in the full enjoyment of confidential intercourse, His brow becomes suddenly clouded, and His spirit depressed, as He thinks how these, His chosen ones, should forget their past attachment to Him, and lose sight even of their present professions of regard, and leave Him in the hands of His bitter persecutors. "Behold," He saith to them, "the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone:

and yet," He continues, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

These words suggest for our edification the inquiry, first, into THE NATURE OF THE CONSOLATION EXPRESSED IN THE ASSERTION, 'THE FATHER IS WITH ME': and secondly, a view of some of THE CIRCUMSTANCES, IN WHICH THE FOLLOWER OF JESUS MAY BE LEFT ALONE, AND IN WHICH HE MAY EXPERIENCE THE SAME COMFORT, IN KNOWING THAT THE FATHER IS WITH HIM.

I. Under our first topic, then, which relates to THE NATURE OF THE CONSOLATION THUS EXPERIENCED, we perceive,

1. That *this consolation is derived from a sense of reconciliation and acceptance with God in Christ.* It is not merely the belief, that God is our Creator, our Preserver, our Benefactor, which supplies the Christian with his brightest consolation. This belief may be shared by those who know not Christ; and may be grounded, not upon the revelations of the Gospel, but upon those convictions, which any thoughtful mind cannot fail to derive from the view of the beauties of God's providence so abundantly shed around. The Christian is permitted to look up to God as a Father and a Friend in a far higher, and more consolatory sense. Shut out as he had been from the Lord's

favor, so long as he continued in transgression and in unbelief, he perceives that God has given His only-begotten Son for him, to redeem him from his transgressions, and to reconcile him to Himself. Through grace he has been led to receive Christ Jesus as his Saviour, and through faith in Him, he has become an adopted child of God, and has received the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father.* The Spirit of God then bears witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God; and it is as a child, an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ,† that he enjoys the richest comfort in speaking of his Father and his God.

This is, evidently, a confidence which is peculiar to the lively and spiritual believer in Christ Jesus. The mere nominal professor of Christianity knows it not; he has never truly received Christ as a Saviour; and through Him been reconciled and at peace with God. The unconverted worldling, called though he be after the name of Christ, knows it not; for, if he have not received the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;‡ and, if he knows not Christ, how can he know the Father, whom Christ only can reveal. It is he, and he only, who, having been convinced of his sinfulness, has truly and earnestly fled to Jesus, and, by faith in Him,

* Rom. viii. 15.

† Ibid. 17.

‡ Ibid. 9.

been washed in His blood, clothed in His righteousness, and sanctified by His Spirit, that can truly say of the Lord, "He is my Father;" that can really look up with childlike confidence and affection unto God, and in all trials and tribulations comfort himself with the reflection, "My Father is with me."

2. Yet the full comfort to be derived from this assurance can only be enjoyed, as we may, secondly, observe, by him *who maintains communion with God in Christ through the Spirit*. We may perceive in the history of our blessed Lord, how necessary this communion with the Father was to the comfort even of *His* soul. Constantly do we find Him retiring from the company even of His chosen disciples, that He might draw near in supplication to His heavenly Father; again and again do we find Him going at the close of a wearisome day unto some mountain, and continuing there all night in prayer to God;* often do we hear of Him rising up a great while before day,† that He might pour out His soul before His Father, and derive from communion with Him that strength and comfort, which should fit Him for the trials and engagements of the day. And who, that follows not His example, can expect to realize His consolations? It is not enough to know

* Matt. xiv. 23 ; Luke vi. 12.

† Mark i. 35.

that there is sufficiency in God, that in Him there is comfort, and joy, and strength; this mere knowledge will not sustain or cheer the soul. The sick and suffering may know the properties of some medicine, which would relieve their pains; the starving mendicant may know that food would supply his cravings, and relieve his want: but, if the food be not obtained, if the medicine be not applied, what avails to them this knowledge? The great truth, that God is the Father of all them that put their trust in Him for Jesus's sake, is the great source of comfort to the tried; but what avails the mere knowledge of this truth to any one, who has not known the enjoyment of communion with this gracious God, and learnt by precious experience of the Lord's faithfulness to say, "My Father is with me!" O happy they, who, in the exercise of a lively faith, maintain this blest communion with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, amid all their trials, their temptations, and their dangers, can realizingly exclaim, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

II. The second topic, suggested by our present subject, leads us to consider SOME FEW OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES, IN WHICH THIS ASSURANCE OF THE FATHER'S PRESENCE AND SUPPORT IS SO

FULL OF CONSOLATION. There are circumstances in the life of every believer, in which he may, or must, be left alone, as regards any other presence or support than that of the Lord, and in which the soul is abundantly sustained by the assurance, "The Father is with me."

1. How often is the child of God met, *at the very outset of a religious course*, by circumstances, which require all the solace and support which such a conviction can supply. So long as he joined in the amusements and vanities of the world, so long as he lived without God and without hope, it may be that he had companions enough. But he has begun to perceive the vanity of a course of worldliness; he has become convinced of his condition as a sinner, and of the awfulness of that condemnation which awaits the impenitent and unbelieving at the bar of God; he has been touched by a sense of God's mercies in providing for him such a Saviour; and, constrained by His love, he has resolved to renounce the world, to take on him the yoke of Jesus, and to follow Him. Readily, it may be, had he been followed before, while anxious to take the lead in vanity and sin: but who is willing to accompany him now that he is anxious to set out for Zion, and to enter on that strait and narrow way, which leadeth to eternal life? The friends and companions of his former years

forsake him with the sneer of contempt for his fanaticism; and too often, even the loved ones of the domestic circle array themselves against what so many deem, an unnecessary change from the heartless vanity of the world to the cordial service and the love of God. Whither then shall he look for counsel and support in these trying circumstances? Abandoned by those who had hitherto been his friends; and left to set out alone upon a path, on which they have no disposition to enter, what must be his trials if he could not, in the strength of a humble, yet well-grounded confidence, exclaim, "The Father is with me?"

The trial to which we thus allude, is one whose bitterness can be but little estimated by those that have not themselves passed through it. O! there is nothing pleasing to flesh and blood, in being constrained to set out alone upon a course, which is opposed to the tastes and habits of all the associates of one's past career, and which provokes the taunts and sneers, the opposition and the enmity even of one's dearest friends. But when the Christian contemplates the amazing interests which are at stake; when he thinks of the dangers which surround a course of habitual worldliness and unbelief and sin; when he looks forward to the prize of the high calling of God

in Christ Jesus,* which allures him to the narrow path of godliness; may he not reply to all the taunting charges of overmuch righteousness, as David did to the reproachful Eliab, Is there not a cause?† Who is there here, that is called upon to undergo this trial? O! are there any here, that are desirous of truly setting out for Zion with their faces thitherward, but who are met by the sneers, the reproaches, the opposition, or the desertion of those whom they have loved? Dearly beloved, ye may surely look upon this as the cross which ye are charged to take up in following Christ. Look steadily then to Jesus, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame;‡ and learn of Him that precious confidence in the midst of trials such as this, which will enable you, whoever may oppose or forsake you, to exclaim, "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me!"

2. Again; the Christian, exposed like other men to the fluctuations and changes of the present scene, is *not unfrequently left alone by the dispensations of Providence*. Some stroke, it may be, of severe bereavement hath swept away the precious ones, that erewhile twined themselves around the heart, and left the once happy

* Phil. iii. 14.

† 1 Sam. xvii. 1.

‡ Heb. xii. 2.

fireside, that rang with the cheerful voices of a joyous circle, desolate and forlorn indeed: some sudden blight upon the worldly prospects may have put lover and friend far from the unfortunate, and hid his acquaintance out of the sight* of one, who not long since was surrounded by obsequiousness; some slanderer's tongue may have made enemies of his dearest friends, caused those of his acquaintance to be afraid of him, and made even those that see him without to convey themselves from him.† Desolate, then, and forlorn, whither could the believer look for comfort in his trouble, but unto the Lord that quickened him? What support, what solace can be equal to that, which may be derived by every true believer from the assurance "I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

It is in circumstances such as these, that the religion of the Gospel seems peculiarly qualified to pour in its precious consolations. It holds out no promise of exemption from the trials that befall mankind, as an inducement for any to enter upon the narrow road; but it holds out such offers of comfort to the cast-down, of succor to the tried, of consolation to the afflicted, of sympathy with the suffering, as seem even more precious than would have been the

* Ps. lxxxviii. 18.

† Ps. xxxi. 11.

offer of exemption from those woes. It is in circumstances such as these, that the heart of the believer is drawn peculiarly to the Lord ; in these things he perceives more and more his need of such a Friend ; in these things he more and more experiences the preciousness of having such a Father to flee to, such an arm on which to lean. Dearly beloved, who among you have been bowed down by the pressure of some providential dispensations, in the midst of which ye seemed, as it were, to be alone in the peculiar bitterness of your woes ? How sweet must be to your souls the lesson, which the example of your Saviour inculcates upon you ! Like Him, ye are encouraged, in whatever trials, to draw near to your Father in heaven ; like Him, ye are permitted to enjoy the assurance of your acceptance and peace with God ; like Him, ye are invited to "cast all your cares," of whatever kind, "upon Him who careth for you ;"* and from Him ye may learn, under whatever circumstances of bereavement, of desertion, of calamity, to exclaim, "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

3. Once more, *There is a period approaching* to the life of every one of us, *in which*, as regards any human companionship, *we must stand alone*. There is one enemy, whom we must encounter

* 1 Pet. v. 7.

unattended; one conflict, on which we must enter singly and separately. The voice of sympathy and friendship may cheer and comfort us through all the trials of *life*; but we must *die* alone. The dying bed-side may be surrounded, indeed, by anxious friends, eager to anticipate each wish, to soothe each pain; the hand of love may smooth the pillow, on which the dying frame is resting, and the voice of tender sympathy whisper its consolations into the ear, until sealed by death's cold grasp; the footsteps of those, with whom we have taken sweet counsel while on earth, may attend us to the very brink of that Jordan, which separates us from the world of spirits; but no further. Alone we must enter its dark waters; alone must breast the oft-tumultuous billows; alone encounter the powers of darkness, there leagued for their last assault. Yet even there, how truly may the Christian say, "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me!" "The Eternal God is my refuge, and underneath me are the everlasting arms."* "I know whom I have believed."† "Though I pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou, Lord, art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."‡

Dearly beloved, such is the confidence of

* Deut. xxxiii. 27. † 2 Tim. i. 12. | Ps. xxiii. 4.

the lively believer in Jesus, when contemplating his coming conflict even with the last dread enemy. That enemy ye must all encounter. Oh! are ye prepared for his approach, by having such a confidence as this in the presence and support of our reconciled God in Christ? Do ye thus know God; have ye accepted "His unspeakable gift;"* do ye, through the Spirit, draw nigh to Him as a Father and a Friend? Is it the great aim and purpose of your lives to "win Christ, and be found in Him, not having your own righteousness,"† but having put Him on as your righteousness and strength? If so, then may ye look up with confidence to Him under the pressure of every woe, and in your last conflict, when even father and mother must forsake you, shall ye be sustained by the sweet assurance, "YET I AM NOT ALONE, BECAUSE THE FATHER IS WITH ME!"

* 2 Cor. ix. 15.

† Phil. iii. 8, 9.

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SERMON VII.

HE DIED FOR ALL.

2 CORINTHIANS v. 15.

*He died for all; that they which live should
not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto
Him who died for them, and rose again.**

"God forbid that I should glory," exclaims the apostle, "save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"† And with him this is not a mere sentiment, an impassioned exclamation brought in to give point to his argument, and then left to sink into forgetfulness; but it is the leading idea in all his writings, the leading principle throughout his life.

And what worthier theme indeed can engage a sinner's thoughts, can call forth the tribute of a sinner's praise? The cross of Christ! Scandal as it was in the Jew's esteem, and foolishness

* Preached on Good Friday.

† Gal. vi. 14.

to the Greek, what is it but the power of God unto the salvation of every soul that hears the voice of Him, who died upon that tree!* How well is it that we should meditate upon it; that we should weep over it; that we should trust in it; that we should thank God for it; that we should glory in it! Yea, how well would it be, that we should determine not to know anything but Jesus Christ, and Him the Crucified! How well would it be, that we should adopt the exclamation of the apostle, and aim at carrying it out, as he did, in all our conversation, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Our Church invites us, at this time especially, to dwell upon this momentous topic. Not content with making it the prominent feature in all her services and ministrations, she calls upon us at this season to devote our especial meditation to the glorious truth. Fearful lest her children should be prone to dwell upon some one doctrine of the Gospel in undue proportion to the rest, she brings them all in course before our minds; and they, who will but follow the course of her teaching, will find each great fact in the Saviour's history, each prominent truth in the Gospel's teaching, pressed in turn upon their observation. Beloved, let us obey her hint this

* 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

day, and meditate upon the cross. Let us follow with awe-struck step the mad crowd that is hurrying Jesus to His death. Let us gaze, as far as we can bear to gaze, upon the agonies in which He gives up His spirit to the Father's hands. Let us listen to the testimony of His dying lips, as He declares the work "finished" which the Father had given Him to do; and thankfully join in the exclamation of the amazed centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

We could not have a better guide for our meditations than the words of the apostle in the text, "He died for all; that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again." Let us first consider the great truth this day peculiarly brought before us, as it is simply stated in the former part of the verse, He died for all; and then make the practical statement of the latter portion, a guide to our application of this momentous subject to our own walk and conversation. And O! thou blessed Spirit, promised by the Lord Jesus as the Teacher and Comforter of His people after His departure to the Father, come, we pray thee, and bear witness of Jesus to our hearts! Bring home to us our need of Jesus; convince us of His suitableness, His preciousness, His sufficiency;

* Matt. xxvii. 54.

sprinkle us with His blood; cover us with His righteousness; clothe us with His salvation; baptize us into His Spirit; fit us for His glory!

I. In the first place, let us consider briefly, under the four heads which the words themselves suggest, THE GREAT TRUTH, "HE DIED FOR ALL."

1. And let us first inquire, WHO DIED FOR ALL? The answer is indeed a simple one: Christ died for all. Yet how momentous again the question, "What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He?"* Who is this Son of Man? Trace Him to His birth; and we find Him little better than a pauper's child; born in a stable; wrapped in swaddling clothes; cradled in a manger, because there is no room for him and his poor mother even in an inn. Follow Him through His childhood and youth; and we see Him in humble circumstances aiding His reputed father in the trade of a carpenter. Trace Him through His years of manhood; and behold Him poor and needy, despised by the rich and proud, hated by the Scribe and Pharisee; and, though at one moment followed by a wondering crowd, left at the next to hunger and privation, and without a place where He may lay His head. And accompany Him to His closing scene; and we look on

* Matt. xxii. 42.

a friendless unprotected man, against whom all classes of the people have joined in a common clamor for His death, and see Him led out as a common malefactor, between two thieves, to die a malefactor's death. Here, then, is not much to wake the world's regard. Yet view the picture from a brighter side. See in that lowly babe, the child, whose coming birth was announced as "that holy thing" which "shall be called the Son of God;"* and whose entrance into this world of sin is heralded by an angelic choir, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!"† See, in that suffering and outcast man, one in whom a prophet of the Lord bids us "behold the Lamb of God;"‡ and whom a voice from the Eternal God Himself proclaims as His Well-beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased.§ Follow Him, even for a few moments of His tempted, persecuted life; and the works we witness, wrought by the motion of His hand, or in obedience to the bidding of His voice, bear testimony to Him, that He is "a Teacher come from God;"|| yea, that there dwells in Him the power of God Himself. Go with Him to Calvary; and there, though no voice from heaven proclaims the truth, the voice of convulsed nature, the

* Luke i. 35. † Luke ii. 14. ‡ John i. 36.

§ Matt. iii. 17.

|| John iii. 2.

darkened sun, the shattered rocks, the quaking earth, the opening graves, extort from us the centurion's cry, "Truly this was the Son of God!"* Here, then, is indeed enough to fix our gaze. The sufferer we behold is a weak and afflicted man; but He is also the Eternal God. He is "despised and rejected of men," "an outcast of the people"† among whom He dwelt; but it is He whom angels worship and archangels praise. He is a tried and tempted creature, a mark for mockery and scorn; but it is He who clothed the heavens with beauty, who gave the earth its being, and all created things their life. This, this is He who is hurried amid the hootings of the populace to a malefactor's cross; none other amid all His weakness than the "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

2. AND DID HE DIE? We see Him indeed hurried by a furious crowd to the scene of execution; we see Him nailed to the accursed tree, and lifted up in agony, suspended by the torn and bleeding hands; we see Him fainting with anguish, parched with thirst, clammy with the dews of death: but did He actually submit to that penalty and curse of sin? Most truly, Yes! The scene we witness upon Calvary this day was no illusion of the senses. It was no dramatic representation to deceive the eye, to excite the

* Matt. xxvii. 54.

† Isa. liii. 3; Ps. xxii. 6.

feelings, to engage the mind. It was an awfully real, a most solemnly authentic fact, that Jesus died. No taunts of the surrounding crowd, no false profession of their readiness to believe, induced Him to come down from the cross, where they had nailed Him. No agony, no fainting, no distress, led Him to call in the aid of the legions of angels, that waited but His bidding, to save Him from the pains of death. The Divinity of the nature which dwelt within that lowly anguished form, raised not the frail flesh which He assumed, above the liability to death. He suffered, and He died! He waited but the moment, when He could see that all things were accomplished, which His Father had commissioned Him to do; and when all the Scriptures, which foretold a suffering Saviour, had been literally fulfilled; when all the types, which foreshadowed the dying Lamb of God, had been in the minutest particular verified; when the righteousness, which the law demanded of our race, had been in every respect fulfilled; and the penalty, which its curse denounced against Adam and his sinful children, waited but the closing act to receive its full satisfaction: then with a loud voice He cried, "It is finished!" and gave up the ghost.* For see, the Jews, whose consciences were easy

* John xix. 30.

under the blood which they had invoked upon themselves and their children, were troubled at the thought of the body remaining upon the cross on the Sabbath-day. They bring with them the Roman guard to complete the work their malice has begun, to break the legs of the sufferers, in order to accelerate their death, that they may be removed. But when they come to Jesus, they see that He is dead. The eye is glazed; the pulse is motionless; the heavings of the chest have ceased; the convulsive writhings of the limbs are over. All is still. Yet, to make assurance doubly sure, behold! a soldier thrusts his spear into the side of the breathless Jesus: it pierces the region of the heart, where the blood is not yet completely chilled; there issues from the wound thus made a mingled stream of blood and water. Had there been one spark of life remaining, that spear must have finished the work. He suffered; He was dead. The Lord of life was crucified. The incarnate God was slain. He died for us. He died for all.

3. YET HOW FOR ALL? In what sense was the death of Christ a death for others? Convinced, that He who died was the incarnate Son of the Eternal God; convinced, that in the human nature He assumed He truly died; it becomes to us, thirdly, a most important ques-

tion, in what sense His dying was a death for others. And, it must be feared, that it is a question about which there is a great deal of indistinctness in the ideas of many who profess and call themselves Christians. Too often, alas! in approaching the sick bed of suffering fellow-sinners to ask them of their faith and hope, when the belief is expressed, the hope of salvation professed, because Christ died for us, the inquiry, "How can Christ's death save *you* from dying?" is met with the stare of vacancy, or the acknowledgment of ignorance. In what sense is it, then, let us ask—how is it that Christ died for all? And it was not, that, by His patience and obedience unto death, He might set an example to all of meekness and submission. It was not, that, by His death, He might set the seal to the truth of the doctrines He had taught, and thus commend to all His heavenly message. It was not, that He might, by dying, remove some of the severity of the law, destroy its condemning power, and open for all an easier way in which they might satisfy its demands, and gain for themselves an entrance into heaven. No; but His death was a real and a full substitution for the death of others. He died in the stead of all. He died in their place, so that all might be able to plead His dying as the reason why they shall not die. The great truth which

the Gospel teaches us concerning our state by nature, is that we are under condemnation. We are all, not merely prone to sin, not merely sinners, but actually found guilty by the law of God. Every child who is born into the world is not only born with a sinful nature, but actually comes into the world under sentence of eternal death. Now, beloved, suppose a criminal brought up before the bar of an earthly tribunal to receive sentence for the guilt of which a jury of his fellow-men have found a verdict against him. The judge inquires of him, "What have you to say why sentence should not be passed upon you, and the punishment which the law enjoins inflicted?" Suppose such criminal to reply, "I have already been punished for this same offence. Sentence for this very crime has been already passed upon me, and the punishment, which was denounced, has been actually endured." If this were true, would not such a man at once go free? Whatever his crime may have been, if he had been already punished for it, he could not be punished again. The very same law, whose majesty required his punishment for the offence, would now step in to prevent a second punishment for the same transgression. It was to put this plea into the mouths of sinners that Jesus died. They, too, are found guilty; guilty, the merest infant, by

the Word of God; guilty, the grown up sinner, by the concurrent testimony of his own accusing conscience. Suppose them too—suppose yourselves, beloved, placed before the bar of God. What have you to say, why sentence of eternal death should not be passed, and your souls sent away to endless woe? The answer which the death of Christ supplies, is this: We have been punished for these sins already. A substitute was offered and was accepted in our stead. The vengeance due to us was poured out upon Him. He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree.”* And the holy law of God itself requires no more than that we should have been once punished for our sins. Nay, more; the justice of the law has been satisfied, and we can now appeal even to the righteousness of God, to save us from the punishment, which Jesus has already suffered in our stead.

4. But is there no limit to this plea? Is it one which all may offer? Yes; HE DIED FOR ALL. All were dead. All are, by nature, under the wrath and curse of God. All are guilty, and exposed to, and awaiting the sentence of eternal death. And universal as is this need, so universal is the supply. Extensive as is the disease, equally extensive is the value of the remedy. Vast as may have been the multitudes that have

* 1 Peter ii. 24.

applied, there is no diminution of the efficacy. Countless as are the multitudes of dead, there is no limit in His power to save. The natural figures, by which our Lord represents His fulness and sufficiency are intended to set forth this truth. He "is the light of the world."* The brightness, with which the sun may beam on us, does not diminish his light to the rest of the world. He shines as brightly now as on the day that Adam fell ; and millions rejoice at the same moment in his genial beams. In Jesus there is " a fountain opened to the house of David for sin and for uncleanness."† Thousands may come and quench their thirst at the fountain-head, and make no difference in its flow. The rills and streams that run from it may be dried up ; but the fountain bubbles still. Yea, vast as may be the multitudes, countless the millions that require the blood of Jesus to wash them from their guilt, and though no man may be able to number the throng of those that have come and washed their robes, there is room still for more. He died for all ; for all, at least, who are dead. If there be any who are not dead, any who are not lost, they need no Saviour ; for them He did not die. But the truths may be mutually reversed. If He died for all, then all are dead. If all are dead, equally true is it, that He died for all.

* John ix. 5.

† Zech. xiii. 1.

II. Let us proceed, beloved, to consider THE EFFECT WHICH THESE STATEMENTS, according to the apostle's suggestion, SHOULD HAVE UPON OUR HEARTS AND LIVES. "He died for all: that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again."

1. And the first remark which this truth suggests is the sad and solemn one, that THOUGH HE DIED FOR ALL, ALL ARE NOT SAVED BY HIS DEATH. Although He died that all might live, all shall not live through Him. But why? Because they will not come to Him that they might have life.* The death of Christ, then, while it is abundantly sufficient for the salvation of all, is effectual only to the salvation of a few. For "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."† Beloved! how solemn is this thought. Vast as is the ruin sin has made, equally vast is the provision which God's love has made for the recovery of our ruined race. Deadly as is the disease which the sin of our first parents infused into the blood of all their children, abundant is the means which the death of Jesus has supplied for the healing of the soul. Wide as is the gulf which our sins have made to separate between us and our God,

* John v. 40.

† Matt. vii. 14.

the sacrifice that has been freely made is precious enough to close up the gap, and bring us near to Him. Yes, there is no sin so deadly that the blood of Jesus cannot wipe it out. There is no sinner so inveterate, that he may not find pardon, healing, life, in the sacrifice of Christ. And yet sinners are not saved; the ruined are not rescued; the dying are not healed. And why? Because they will not come; because they will not even look to Jesus that they may be saved. Beloved, are there any such among you, of whom it must be feared that ye have not come to Jesus to be saved? behold, He calleth to you amid the agonies of His cross, Look unto me! If he died for you, then surely ye are dead. And if ye are dead, then ye must come to Him that ye may live. Dearly beloved, the Saviour calls to you, who yet are in your sins, to look to Him and live. O! look to Him, and see what that wrath of God was which He bore for you. If ye go not to Him ye must bear that wrath yourselves. It was "a fearful thing," even for Him, "to fall into the hands of the Living God."* O! what then will it be for you, if ye should not have found in Him a refuge from the wrath to come!

2. WHO THEN ARE THEY, let us, secondly, enquire, WHO ARE THEY THAT SHALL LIVE? THOSE

* Heb. x. 31.

ONLY WHO BELIEVE. Faith is the principle of life. "As many as received Him," saith the Evangelist, "to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."* "He that believeth on me," saith our blessed Lord, "hath everlasting life; and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."† "I am crucified with Christ," saith our apostle, "nevertheless I live: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."‡ Those, then, that believe are they that live. All that believe not, still continue dead. There is no neutral state. "He that believeth not is condemned already."§ He only lives, who truly and cordially believes. Beloved, how important is then the inquiry, Do ye believe? How momentous the duty to "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith."|| It is no thing of course that ye believe, because ye are called Christians. Do ye believe that, by nature and by practice, ye are lost and guilty sinners, and were dead in trespasses and sin? Do ye believe that Jesus bore your sins in His own body on the tree, and hath made atonement unto God for you? Do ye believe the record which God hath given you concerning Him, that

* John i. 12. † John v. 24; vi. 47. ‡ Gal. ii. 20.

§ John iii. 18.

|| 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

He hath given to you eternal life, and this life is in His Son? * Do ye believe His gracious message when He saith to you, Your sins are forgiven you, go in peace? † He that thus hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. ‡ O then, beloved, make this important enquiry, Are ye truly believers in Jesus? He calls to you amid His dying agonies; He bids you turn the eye of faith to Him and live. Life, then, and death are suspended upon your compliance. Refuse His call, and ye are dead. Obey His voice, only look unto Him, and ye are saved.

3. Once more, let us observe THE FRUIT OF THIS PRINCIPLE OF LIFE. "He died for all; that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." The faith of which we speak is an active principle. It recognises man's lost condition; it perceives how wondrous was that love, which brought the Saviour down to raise him from his ruin; it brings home to the heart such a sense of that wondrous love, as engages the affections and draws out the love of all that in truth believe the record of it. Can it be that I can know myself to have been dead, to have been subject to the curse, an heir of hell; can I believe that Jesus came and put himself in my

* 2 John v. 11. † Matt. ix. 2. ‡ 1 John v. 12.

place, bore in my stead the curse that lay on me, and made me an heir of heaven; can I believe this in my inmost heart, and yet find no gratitude stirred up within, no love called forth to Him who hath saved me from such a death, raised me to such a life? Not so judged the Apostle. "The love of Christ," he saith, "constraineth us."* If we believe that we were dead; if we believe that He died that we might live; then will His love constrain us to live not to ourselves, but unto Him. Away, then, with the weak calumny that the belief of our being freely saved through the blood of Jesus, of mere grace alone, will lead to immorality and carelessness of life. No, beloved; go, stand beneath the cross on which our Saviour hangs this day. See in *His* agonies the punishment of *your* sins. Behold, in the darkness that enshrouds Him, and the anguished prayer under the hidings of His Father's face, how your curse was laid upon Him. Hear in His dying cry the charter of your life. And ye will not, cannot go from thence, believing that it was your sin which caused it all, and yet rush heedlessly into sin again. And think, O think, ye who by faith have laid your sins upon the dying Lamb, think what should be your life of faith in Him; think how ye should seek His glory, and obey his

* 2 Cor. v. 14.

precepts, and show forth his praise. Yea, think how ye should LIVE TO HIM. How many, alas! live unto themselves, seek their own pleasure, follow their own ease, aim at their own honor, walk in their own ways! But ye who believe how Christ hath loved you, ye ought to live to Him. O come, then, this day, beloved; come, and beneath the cross, devote yourselves afresh to Jesus. Look on His bleeding wounds; gaze on His writhing limbs; behold His awful agonies; hear His expiring cry; and ask yourselves, What can be too much to do or give for Him who bore so much for you?

SERMON VIII.

RISEN WITH CHRIST.

COLOSSIANS III. 1.

*If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.**

"I AM the Resurrection and the Life," said our Lord to the weeping sister of His departed friend, whose dust was even now returning to its dust; "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." †

These words of her gracious Lord our Church puts into the mouth of her ministers, as they meet the bier, whereon some departed brother or sister in the Lord is laid, at the threshold of the resting-place of the dead. The first words which break upon the stillness of the mournful

* Preached on Easter Day.

† John xi. 25, 26.

train, that follow the lifeless clay of some kinsman or friend to its last narrow home, are those in which the Lord of life would withdraw the thoughts from the cold grave to the brightness of that resurrection-morn, where the dust of sleeping millions shall awaken at His voice. And they, who go to the grave to weep there over the sod, that hides from their most anxious gaze the remnant of what was once so precious to their eyes, so dear to their inmost hearts, may surely hear the gracious voice of Him, who stood in the mysterious union of His meekness and His might beside the grave of Lazarus, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Gracious is, indeed, the assurance, consoling indeed the promise, which these words of our Lord contain, to those who have been called upon in the good providence of God to commit some loved, some precious one to the yawning grave. Sorrow may overwhelm the heart just conscious of the bitterness of that bereavement which hath left the fireside desolate, and the heart forlorn; but *they* sorrow not, as those that have no hope, who hear and can appropriate the words of Jesus, speaking of himself as "the Resurrection and the Life." All that was necessary to render the warrant for this consolation complete, we may now see to have been accomplished. Could Martha receive the words of

Jesus as those of Eternal truth, and believe His promise, when He addressed her as the Resurrection and the Life; how much more, then, may we receive and rejoice in them, who have the proofs, to which our attention is at this season drawn, that He has "become the first-fruits of them that slept."* The comfort, which such an assurance gives, is damped by no shade of doubt concerning His truth who gave it; nay, more, the hope it cherishes is brightened, and quickened by the light, which breaks upon the bursting sepulchre, where our Lord was laid, and stamps upon His brow, as He comes forth from the short captivity of the grave, the living characters, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Consoling, however, as is the truth, to which our thoughts are at this season turned, to those who can in faith commit their beloved ones to the cold grave; it is yet more important in its bearing upon the faith, the hopes, the character, and the conduct of those who are spending their appointed day upon the earth, than it is in its consolation concerning those whose course is run. Sweet as consolation is, it is salvation which is important. Precious as is to the mourner the hope of meeting those that have gone to sleep in Jesus, when God shall bring

* 1 Cor. xv. 20.

them with Him at His coming, that hope belongs only to those, who themselves have an interest in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. O! would that men thought more of this! How many are there, that speak of some departed friend, as if full of comfort in the thought of a reunion in the world of light, who have never, it may be feared, seriously examined the grounds of their own confidence, have never clung in earnest to the cross of Christ, nor experienced in truth "the power of His resurrection."* How many take up the language of the Christian's consolation, and profess to dry their tears of sorrow for some dear one's loss with the sweet hope of recognition in the day of the Lord, to whom, it must be feared from their present life, the voice which wakes the dead must be a voice of terror, and the glory of the resurrection morn, the consummation of their wretchedness for ever!

It is to this important and practical view of the resurrection of our Lord from the dead that the words of the text demand our attention. They suggest to us the momentous bearing, which that truth has upon the character and conversation of the Christian; they call our thoughts back from the grave, where sleeps the dust of those that have gone to their rest, to ourselves who yet are sojourning in this dying world; they bid us

* Phil. iii. 10.

examine the foundation of our hopes, and look into the structure of our conduct, as we would share the glories of His resurrection, who was "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."*

To this examination and enquiry, beloved, I would desire this afternoon to direct your attention. In the light of the resurrection of Jesus, I would desire to urge upon you the examination of your state and character in the sight of God. Before Him who quickeneth the dead, I would press upon you the enquiry, whether ye are "dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world,"† and with Him "raised again through the faith of the operation of God."‡ May "the spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead"§ be present to aid and bless us in the enquiry! May He lay bare to you all the secrets of your own hearts, and so testify to you of Christ, that, having fellowship with Him in His death, ye may partake with Him in the glories of His risen life!

In the prosecution of our subject, let us first, briefly consider THE GREAT TRUTH, to which the mind of the whole Christian Church is at this season directed, THAT CHRIST IS RISEN : secondly,

* Rom. iv. 25.

† Col. ii. 20.

‡ Ib. 12.

§ Rom. viii. 11.

THE IMPORTANT DOCTRINE, THAT THE TRUE BELIEVER IS ALREADY RISEN WITH CHRIST: and, thirdly, THE PRACTICAL RESULT AND EVIDENCE OF THIS DOCTRINE WHEREVER IT IS RECEIVED—THE SEEKING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD. May the Spirit of glory and of God rest upon us, and sanctify these considerations to our souls' good!

I. And, in the first place, beloved, the great truth, that CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, stands forth upon the sacred page, encircled with a clear and glorious light, such as shines upon no one other fact in the blessed book.

1. *The types and shadows of the Old Testament prefigured it.* To mention no others, the Apostle refers us to the case of ISAAC, as having been in a figure received back from the dead,* as a typical representation of Him, upon whom was laid the wood for His own sacrifice, against whom the Father stretched forth His hand to smite Him for a world's transgression, but who returned to the young men, His disciples, that waited for His coming. And the prophet JONAH, who was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, is referred to by our Lord Himself,

* Heb. xi. 19.

as a figure of His being the same time in the heart of the earth, and coming forth again in the freshness of renewed life.*

2. *Our Lord Himself foretold it.* "Destroy this temple," He said to the Jews that asked of Him a sign, "and in three days I will raise it up." "He spake," saith the Evangelist, "of the temple of His body."† When He came down from the mount of transfiguration, He charged the chosen three, who had been witnesses of His glory, that they should "tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man were risen from the dead."‡ And, often as He spake to the twelve concerning His approaching sufferings, He accompanied the announcement with the promise of His resurrection; saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be killed, and the third day rise again."§

3. *Angels announced it.* For when, with the first streak of dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were come to see the sepulchre, an angel sat upon the stone now rolled away from the grave's mouth, who said unto the women, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said."||

4. *Eye-witnesses beheld it.* They saw not, in-

* Matt. xii. 40. † John ii. 18—21. ‡ Matt. xvii. 9.

§ Mark viii. 31.

|| Matt. xxviii. 5, 6.

deed, the actual rising from the grave; for none, save the affrighted Roman guard, were by at the moment. But the risen Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene and called her by her name.* He joined the two disciples on their walk to Emmaus, and became known to them in breaking of bread.† He came into the upper chamber, where the disciples were assembled with doors closed for fear of the Jews, and said unto them, "Peace be unto you."‡ He came again in the same manner, when the doubting Thomas was among the number, and, showing him His hands and His side, wrung from him the adoring exclamation, "My Lord and my God."§ He came among them by the sea of Galilee; and, while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He took of the meat they offered, and did eat before them.|| And St. Paul assures us, that upwards of five hundred brethren at once beheld Him, that He was alive from the dead.¶

5. *His enemies could not deny it.* For, while they put into the mouths of the Roman guard the impious tale, and paid them for the falsehood, that His disciples came and stole Him away while they slept,** no attempt was made to expose this pretended imposture to the people, no

* John xx. 14—16. † Luke xxiv. 13—30. ‡ John xx. 19.

§ John xx. 27, 28. || Luke xxiv. 41—43. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 6.

** Matt. xxviii. 12, 13.

effort used to bring the disciples to punishment for their offence. And enemies, from that day to this, have assailed this truth, upon whose minds the accumulated evidence which supports it hath flashed conviction, and whose enmity has been by the power of the resurrection turned into love.

"Now," then, may we unhesitatingly take up the language of the exulting Apostle, "Now is Christ risen from the dead!"*

II. From the contemplation of this glorious and most certain truth, pass we on to consider, in the second place, a doctrine which the Word of God has placed upon the same foundation, that THE BELIEVER IN JESUS, THE TRUE CHRISTIAN, IS RISEN WITH HIM.

1. The believer is risen with Jesus, *by virtue of his federal relation to Him*, his mystical union with Him, as a member of the body, which suffered, was buried, and rose again from the grave. When Adam sinned, he sinned not alone. The death which was denounced against his transgression, embraced in its fatal grasp all the descendants of that sinning man to the latest time. "In Adam all died."† When Jesus suffered and died, His Church and people died in Him. Those whom the Father had given Him to

* 1 Cor. xv. 20.

† Ib. 22.

be His people, stand to Him in the same relation in which the body stands to the head. And, as surely as the writhing, mangled body of the meek Redeemer died at the same time that He bowed His gentle head and gave up the ghost,* so surely did His people suffer in His sufferings the punishment denounced against their transgressions; the curse which He sustained in their stead. And, as surely as the body, which was laid in the new tomb, came forth from the bonds in which it was not possible it should be detained,† at the same time that the glorious head burst forth from its short sleep; so surely did the Church of Christ, the people of His love, and every individual member of that people, come forth with Him, their risen Head, delivered from the curse, justified, and saved.

Upon this great and momentous doctrine, the Apostle continually dwells. Asserting to the Romans, that "Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more," he urges upon those, who, he says, were "called to be saints," that they should "reckon," or consider "themselves, as dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."‡ He is here not so much inculcating a duty as setting forth their privilege. To the Ephesians he writes concerning the Church, which is the body of Christ, the "fulness of Him

* John xix. 30. † Acts ii. 24. ‡ Rom. vi. 9, 10, 11.

that filleth all in all,"* that this body was quickened by the same power, and by the same exertion of that power, which raised Jesus from the dead. For "God," he saith, "who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."† He here speaks of the Church, the believing people of God, as being raised with Jesus when He rose; as having even ascended with Him to the heavenly places, where now He sitteth at the right hand of God. To the same purpose he speaks to the Colossian Christians; "You, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses."‡ "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."§

The true, the living members, then, of the Church, the body of Christ, are not merely looking forward to their resurrection; they see it already accomplished. They are "risen with Christ." The frail flesh indeed must yet pass through the grave and gate of death, and its

* Eph. i. 23.

† Eph. ii. 4, 5, 6.

‡ Col. ii. 13.

§ Col. iii. 3, 4.

resurrection is yet future. But the soul, the important part, is already risen with Christ, and sits with Him in heavenly places.

2. The union, of which we here speak, is, however, a mystical, a mysterious union. Many profess to believe themselves partakers of it by virtue of some outward ordinance alone. Yet we may trace its existence by observing, secondly, that the believer, the true Christian, is risen with Christ, *by virtue of an inward and spiritual change wrought in him by the power of the same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead.*

Unpalatable as is the truth to the pride of our corrupt nature, it is one which the Word of God makes but too plain, that every one, who is born into the world, comes into it in a state of spiritual death. The universal condition of mankind is such, that they are all by nature "dead in trespasses and sins."* And in this state man continues, until by some mighty operation of the Spirit of the Lord, shadowed forth by the sacrament of baptism, he is quickened together with Christ. The change, which then takes place in every one thus quickened by the Spirit of God, is a change from darkness to light, from death unto life, from the power of Satan unto God.† It is an inward and spiritual change, wrought in the heart by the power of

* Eph. ii. 1.

† Acts xxvi. 18.

the Spirit of God; as great as the return of an aged man to a state of infancy; as wonderful as the resurrection of the dead body of Jesus from the tomb; as easy of demonstration by its effects, as was the resurrection of Jesus capable of proof to those who had seen Him dead, and now saw and handled Him alive. It is a change of principle, from the love of self and of the world, to the love of God; it is a change of character, from that of a slave of the world, and of the flesh, to being a servant of the living God; it is a change of conduct, from the vain conversation of a sinful world, to the endeavor in all things to please God. Faith in Christ is its leading principle; the love of Christ its chief enjoyment; the glory of Christ its unceasing aim; the presence of Christ in His kingdom its constant expectation.

Mysterious, then, as may be the union of Christians, as the members of that body which died upon the cross, was buried, and rose again, here is an evidence, by which that union may be ascertained. Mysterious was the resurrection of the body of the Lord Himself; no eye witnessed it; no words can explain it; but it was evident to those who saw and spake with Him, that it had taken place. And equally evident will it be, in the case of all who are mystically members of the body of Christ, that they have undergone

a spiritual change; that they have truly died to sin, and risen again with Jesus to newness and holiness of life. O! then, ye who profess to call yourselves Christians, who trust that ye are members of the risen body of Jesus, a portion of His living Church, look to it whether ye have undergone this change, whether ye have in truth thus died to sin, whether ye have been renewed in the spirit of your minds, and been made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

III. We may perceive, under the third head of our present subject, an evidence by which we may ascertain this truth; for we may be assured, from the manner in which the Apostle enjoins it in the text, that EVERY ONE, WHO IS THUS RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEKS THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

What are the things of which the Apostle speaks, "the things which are above?"

1. We may first mention *peace with God*, a continued sense of His favor and His love. It is indeed the privilege of every one that truly believes in Jesus, the very moment that he truly comes to Him, that "being justified by faith, he has peace with God."* And yet, alas! what Christian can there be, who does not know how

* Rom. v. 1.

many things there are, which continually assail, which threaten to deprive him of, this peace? The lusts of a sinful flesh are continually rising against the suggestions of the Spirit. The temptations of a wicked but ensnaring world are constantly obstructing his path, and seducing him to sin. The great adversary, the Devil, is unceasingly watching his opportunity to insinuate some evil thought, to lure him to some sinful act. What wonder is it, if, under the combined influence of these assaults, he is forced at times to confess with the Apostle, "The good that I would, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do;"* and with him to cry out, "O! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"† Where can he find comfort? how can he maintain this peace, unless, by the continual and the lively exercise of faith, he flies to Jesus, makes known to Him all his conflict, lays upon Him all his sin, and seeks that grace and strength, which shall make him conqueror of these enemies of his peace? This peace is the gift of God; it is freely and graciously bestowed upon all, who close with His offers of mercy in Christ Jesus; and if there were no temptations, if there were no sins, if there were nothing to come, as a cloud, between the soul of the believer and the Lord he loves,

* Rom. vii. 19.

† Ib. 24.

there would be no interruption to this peace. But the believer, so far from being free from sin, because he is dead to its dominion, only enters upon his conflict with it, when he begins to believe in Christ. And, as he would hope for success, as he would gain the victory, he must seek continually, through the risen Jesus, that peace and joy in the Lord, which shall be his strength against corruption, his cordial in the struggle against sin.

2. Yet, desirable as is the enjoyment of this peace, the true believer in Jesus desires more earnestly, and seeks more ardently, *conformity to His image*. And herein is, above all things, manifested the genuineness and reality of the change, which is wrought in him who is risen with Christ. Peace, on any terms, is all that the worldly care for. So long as they can go on, with consciences undisturbed, in the ways of their own hearts, so long as they can cry, Peace, Peace, to their souls, though it be in the ways of sin, they are content. Not so the awakened, the renewed soul. Sin is its great burden. Sin is what it most hates. The great desire of the believer's heart is to be made free from sin; to be delivered from its power, to be emancipated from its chains. To this end he sets before him the pattern of Christ Jesus. Content with no lower standard, he steadily fixes his gaze upon

the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."* To this rule he desires to bring all his purposes and all his pursuits. By this scale he desires to measure all his conduct and all his conversation. For this he prays, for this he strives, to this he earnestly presses forward, that he may be made like unto Christ; that, being conformed to His image here, he may hope to share His glory hereafter.

3. Yes! here we have a third object of the true believer's search—*meetness for His glory*. And can we but not see here also the great, the wide distinction between the Christian and the world? What do the children of the world think of heaven, but as a mere refuge from the flames of hell, a mere preferable alternative to the torments of the lost? They think not of it as a pure and holy place, into which no sin can enter, where no unholiness can dwell. They hear of it as a happy land; and, when they must part with earth, they hope to go where happiness abounds. But to the renewed soul, the chief charm of heaven is its holiness. He looks upon it as God's dwelling-place, with whom nothing that is evil can dwell; he thinks of it as the home of Jesus, where He sits amid the glory of His eternal state; he hears of it as a scene of endless worship, and unceasing praise, where angels and

* Eph. iv. 13.

the spirits of the just raise an unending song of "Glory to the Lord!" But how could such a scene be a scene of happiness to him, if he be not made holy? How could he delight for ever in God's presence, how join for ever in His praise, if he be not transformed into His image, and sanctified by His indwelling? This, then, he seeks from God; for whence, but from the Lord, can come that grace which can fit the soul to dwell with Him? For this he prays, he watches, and he strives, that, sin being subdued within him, and the Spirit dwelling in his heart, he may daily grow in grace, and in meetness for God's glory.

Dearly beloved, I would press upon you these solemn truths. I would urge upon your attention these important features of the Christian's character. I would entreat you to examine by these tests whether ye are indeed dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world;* whether ye are in truth risen with Him to newness and holiness of life.

Beloved, how can *ye* abide this test, who must be constrained to confess that your thoughts, your affections, your pursuits, are all of the earth, earthy? Too many such, it may be feared, there are, who, while they call themselves by the name of Christ, and claim to be

* Col. ii. 20.

members of that Church which is His body, because they have been outwardly admitted into its pale, yet have never in true earnest sought "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." Dear friends and fellow-sinners, I would entreat you to consider how plainly, throughout the Gospel, the religion of Christ Jesus is shown to be the religion of the heart, and the death and resurrection of Christ are set forth as the pattern of a spiritual change, through which every soul must pass, that would enter into His kingdom. Dead as ye are by nature, and by practice too, in trespasses and sins, ye have never died to sin, and, awaking, cast off its chains, and risen to newness of life. How then can the promise of Him, who is "the Resurrection and the Life," pour any comfort over your hearts? O! beloved, seek, let me entreat you, seek His grace and quickening Spirit now; as ye love your soul's salvation, pray to Him to quicken, to animate, to save you; for, be assured, that, unless ye experience the power of His resurrection now, the voice, which shall wake your sleeping dust, must wake you to despair.

Dearly beloved, I trust there are those among you, who, having "been planted together in the likeness of Christ's death," have experienced also "the power of His resurrection;" who have in

truth died unto sin, and risen again to newness of life.* Let me urge upon you, beloved, the remembrance, that this resurrection was but the commencement of your renewed life. Before that, ye were dead. Then only ye began to live. Then ye began to seek for heavenly things; then ye began to value your soul's peace. Think not, then, your work finished, when, perhaps, it is but just begun. Seek still, O! continue to seek, O! persevere and be earnest in seeking, "those things which are above." Consistency requires it. Ye profess to be acting on a different principle from, and to be ruled by a higher motive than, the world. Surely ye should aim at higher objects than the world, and maintain a holier conversation. Your own expectations demand it. Ye are looking out for Him, who is now at the right hand of God. Surely ye should have your conversation there, and live as ye would wish your Lord to find you at His coming. Aim, then, at maintaining peace with God; seek after conformity to His image; strive after meetness for His glory; and then, when "all that are in the graves shall hear the voice" of Him, who is the Resurrection and the Life, "and shall come forth,"† ye shall enter on the glories of that "Kingdom, prepared for" His purchased people "before the foundation of the world."‡

* Rom. vi. 4, 5. † John v. 28, 29. ‡ Matt. xxv. 34.

SERMON IX.

THE SON LEARNING OBEDIENCE.

HEBREWS v. 8, 9.

Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him.

“IT became Him,” saith our Apostle, “for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”*

And there is indeed something, which peculiarly commends itself to the sympathies and feelings of our nature, in the idea of a SUFFERING SAVIOUR. Our flesh is a suffering flesh. Sin, which brought death into the world, brought with it also a long train of pains and

* Heb. ii. 10.

weaknesses, which are the various stages, as it were, in our journey to the dark grave. And, in its hour of suffering and anguish, there is something soothing to the frail flesh in having an arm to lean upon, a hand to press against our aching head, which has learned tenderness and sympathy in the same school of agony. Our condition in every respect is one of suffering. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."* Bereavement, poverty, affliction, calamity in some of its various forms, distress in some of its numerous aspects, privation in some of its pinching approaches, tribulation in some of its various hues, is at some period or other the lot of frail mortality. And, when flesh and heart are ready to fail, there is something cheering, comforting, sustaining in the word of sympathy, the voice of consolation, when it is offered by one, who has encountered trial in its every form, and trod the very same path of suffering in which we are called to walk.

Yet there is also something animating, elevating, inspiring, in the contemplation of a GLORIFIED SAVIOUR. 'Tis sweet, in the hour of weakness, to think that the voice which whispers sympathy is the voice of one, who is as able to succor, as He is to feel for us. 'Tis cheering, in the hour of tribulation, to look upon the glory that should

* Job v. 7.

follow the trials through which our sympathizing Friend has passed, and to learn, that through the same path of tribulation lies the way to the same glory. 'Tis animating, in periods of depression, darkness, and despondency, to contemplate Him, whose "soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,"* who was "troubled and very heavy,"† at the thought of the woes that were before Him, exalted now as "a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins,"‡ and to hear His voice exhorting those "that walk in darkness and have no light, to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God."§

Upon both these views of the preciousness of Christ, it is the Apostle's great delight to dwell. Proclaiming the cross of Christ, as the only foundation of a sinner's peace with God, the only ground on which can rest one solid hope of salvation from the wrath to come, he sets forth in touching light, the sympathy which Jesus thus acquired with His people's sufferings, he paints in glowing hues the value of His mediation, who can point to His own honored wounds as the ground on which He pleads for blessings on His people. And, O, how well would it be for us, beloved, if we could fully enter into the Apostle's views, and share the feelings

* Matt. xxvi. 38.

† Ib. 37.

‡ Acts v. 31.

§ Is. l. 10.

with which he contemplates the perfection of Jesus. If, making the cross of Him, the crucified, the one and only ground on which we looked for the forgiveness of our sins, we realized the sympathy of Jesus, as a suffering Saviour, with our every weakness and our every woe, and simply leaned upon the strength of Jesus as our exalted Saviour, for our success in every conflict, our deliverance from every danger, our victory over every foe ; O, if we thus looked to Jesus, and found Him our salvation, our comfort, and our strength, what more could we need for our present peace, what more for our everlasting joy ? Guilty sinner, here is pardon ! sorrowing mourner, here is comfort ! fainting traveller, here is strength ! What is the case, which is not here met ; whose the necessity for which there is not here a supply ; what the trial, for which there is not here a deliverance ? "O, that men were wise ; that they understood,"* in this their day, "the things which belong to their peace, before they are hid from their eyes."†

I trust it may be well, beloved, to make these views of Jesus and His love the subject of our present meditation. We may still linger, I should hope with profit, near the cross, where we have so lately seen the meek Redeemer lifted up, a sacrifice for His people's sins, and gather some

* Deut. xxxii. 29.

† Luke xix. 42.

of the lessons of sympathy and of comfort, which the view of His agonies supplies. We may contemplate, I should hope, with profit, the glory of His resurrection, and learn, beneath its beams, some lessons of confidence, and gather, in its light, some strength and help for our pilgrimage and our conflict through this sinful world. But that it may be with profit, let us entreat the presence and the blessing of God's Holy Spirit. Let us pray Him to take of the things of Christ, and show them to our souls. Let us pray, that, by His mighty working, "Christ" may be formed "in us, the hope of glory;"* that, being "dead with Him from the rudiments of the world,"† and risen with Him to newness of life, we may walk with Him here, and hereafter enter into His joy.

Taking the words of the text as our guide, let us consider first, briefly, THE GLORY OF THE FIRST ESTATE, FROM WHICH THE LORD JESUS CAME; secondly, THE STATE OF SUFFERING, TO WHICH HE CONDESCENDED, and the purpose of those sufferings to which the text calls our attention; and, thirdly, THE STATE OF PERFECTION, TO WHICH THROUGH SUFFERINGS HE ATTAINED, and which commends Him as a Saviour to a suffering and dying world. And may the Lord awaken in

* Col. i. 27.

† Col. ii. 20.

some poor sinner's heart, here present, an interest in these momentous truths!

I. And, in the first place, THE GLORY OF HIS FIRST ESTATE is brought before our notice in the words, "Though He were a Son."

We find, indeed, that, as being the creatures of the Almighty Word, THE ANGELS are called the sons of God. For when this beauteous universe sprang into being at the word of God, who "spake and it was made, who commanded, and it stood fast,"* "the morning stars," we are told, "sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."†

And we find also, that, from the time that the Lord has had a Church upon earth, HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE have been called the sons of God. For thus said the Lord to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, even my first born; let my son go, that he may serve me."‡ And when the Lord Jesus "came unto His own, and His own received Him not, as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God."§

Yet it is evident that the Scriptures speak of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God IN A FAR

* Ps. xxxiii. 9. † Job xxxviii. 7. ‡ Exod. iv. 22, 23.

§ John i. 11, 12.

HIGHER SENSE than either of these. The title of "sons of God" is given to the Lord's believing people, simply because of their relation to and their union with Him; who is the only begotten of the Father. And the superiority of the Lord Jesus, as a Son, to the very highest angelic natures, is made the subject of special argument by the Apostle, whose words we are considering. "He is made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."* The calling His angels "sons of God" is on the Lord's part an act of kindness and of grace. The title belongs to Jesus as His inheritance. "And when He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him."† Yes, the Son that is here spoken of is He, "whom God hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." "He is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person." "He upholdeth all things by the word of His power."‡ He is as much superior to Moses, who was a son of God, as the builder of a house is superior to the house he builds.§ He is as much superior to angels and archangels as the God who is worshipped is superior to the beings that worship Him.

* Heb. i. 4.

† Ib. 6.

‡ Ib. 2, 3.

§ Heb. iii. 3.

Beloved, if this be so, surely we cannot too often reflect, how vast, how amazing was the love of God in giving up this Son of His love, His only-begotten, in whom His heart delighted, to suffering and to death for guilty man. Herein is love indeed, not that we loved God; but that He loved us, and sent His Son, His only-begotten, His well-beloved, to be the Saviour of the world.* Sinner! guilty, trembling, desponding sinner! look upon this love, and what more encouragement can you require to warrant you in coming to throw yourself for mercy at His feet? Sinner! careless, worldly, hardened sinner! think upon this love; and ask, how can ye escape, if ye despise this mercy, and neglect this great salvation?†

Beloved, if this be so, can we too often reflect upon the condescension and the love of Him, who, though He were the Son of God, became the Son of man, that He might suffer, bleed, and die for us? He looked down upon a dying world; He saw a world of sinners doomed to death, and destined to the pit; He threw Himself into the gap, and cried, "Deliver them from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."‡ What must be the sinner's heart, that can really think upon the love of Jesus, can gaze upon His agonies, can hear His dying cries,

* 1 John iv. 10.

† Heb. ii. 3.

‡ Job xxxiii. 24.

and yet go on in sin, "crucifying Him afresh, and putting Him to open shame?"*

II. This view of the dignity of Jesus, as the Son of God, is surely strengthened and confirmed by the account which the Apostle gives us of the purpose of His sufferings. This we are, in the second place, to consider;—THE STATE OF SUFFERING TO WHICH HE CONDESCENDED, AND THE PURPOSE OF THOSE SUFFERINGS, SO FAR AS HE HIMSELF IS CONCERNED.

"Though he were a Son," saith our text, "yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." The whole force of this contrast consists in the excellence of the nature of the Lord Jesus, His dignity, His authority, His Divinity, before He came into the world. If He had been a created being, even though He were the highest archangel that bends before the throne, He would not have had to begin then to learn obedience. The little that is told us concerning the angelic hosts, reveals them unto us as "ministers of God, that do His pleasure;"† as beings whose delight it is, as it were, to anticipate the wishes of their Lord and King, and to fly on the wings of cheerful obedience to execute their Maker's will. It had been nothing new

* Heb. vi. 6.

† Ps. ciii. 20, 21.

then to the highest angelic nature to do God's will on earth, as it had been done in heaven.

But, to the blessed Jesus, it was something new to obey. Accustomed from all Eternity—from that period in Eternity at least, at which the word had gone forth, and hosts of angelic spirits peopled at once the vast immensity, where, until then, the Eternal Three in One had been alone in boundless happiness; accustomed from that period to the homage and the service of the beings He had called into life, He had never known a superior, to whose will He must bow, whose commands He must obey. But, when He came into the world, He came to obey the law of God for man. He came to assume what was to Him an entirely new character; to place Himself in an untried position; to take upon Him a service and a yoke, to which, up to this time, His neck had never bowed. He came then, and placed Himself, as it were, at school. He put Himself at once under the discipline which was necessary to perfect Him in obedience; He began to learn the lessons, through which He should come forth "complete in all the will of God."*

And O! what a school of suffering it was, in which He learned obedience! O! what a

* Col. iv. 12.

rigorous and painful discipline it was, by which He was perfected for His work. Was not His flesh like our flesh, which often pleads for ease, indulgence, gratification? Yes! but He never yielded to its pleadings; He hungered and thirsted; He suffered cold and nakedness; He had not where to lay his head. Was not His flesh like our flesh, which shrinks from pain, from torture, and from death? Yes! but He voluntarily encountered all; was buffeted, scourged, tormented, slain. These were painful lessons indeed; this was in truth a rigorous discipline; yet He, who was accustomed to command the hosts of heaven, passed through all this, that He might not only show His readiness, but might also by experience learn what it is, to obey.

How important, beloved, are the lessons, which the contemplation of the school, in which the Lord Jesus learned obedience to His Father's will is calculated to impress upon us!

1. Shall it not teach us, first, that *the way in which the Lord teaches us submission to His will is, by placing us in the school of trial*, and subjecting us to discipline, from which our frail nature shrinks. It is easy enough to submit to the will of God, when His will is the same as our own. When it pleases Him to favor us with health, with abundance, with domestic

happiness, with social peace, it is not difficult to bow to His dispensation. Many of us, perhaps, when all is thus going well with us, imagine, not only that we are thankful for the blessings, but that, if it should seem fit to the Lord, we could cheerfully resign them all to His will. The Lord then appoints the stroke. In the manner, perhaps, in which we least expect it, some cloud is brought over the brightness of our prospect. Health fails; or poverty approaches; or bereavement wounds the heart, and makes the household desolate. Where is the submission then? 'Could I not have borne anything better, than the failure of my health? If the Lord's time had come, I trust I could have met death as a conquered enemy, and have commended my spirit to my Father's hands. But to be thus laid aside; to be a useless and unprofitable thing; a weariness to myself, a burden upon others, and no good to any one; this is trying indeed.' Beloved, let one, who has passed through it, assure you, this is no easy discipline. Yet whatever may be the trial, by just such reasonings is the heart ready to persuade itself, that, if it had been any other, it could have been better borne.

Conscious, then, as we may be of our state as sinners, it is not until we have passed through some trials, that we find out the hidden evils of our hearts. Then it is that we discover what

pride, what rebellion, what waywardness, what selfishness there is in us, and learn how hard it is to have no will but God's. Who then can doubt, that His way of teaching, painful as it may be, is yet the best? We ask for grace, for patience, for submission to God's will. He grants the prayer; but how? By placing us in circumstances of affliction, which require the grace; by putting us in scenes of trial, which work the patience; by laying us upon beds of anguish, which test our submission. Beloved! this was the school, in which the Lord Jesus learned. How well will it be, if, by the same discipline, we learn to be like Him!

2. Shall we not learn, again, from the discipline through which He passed, that *obedience is a practical duty*? It is not a mere profession; it is not merely a principle; it is a principle carried out into practice. It is the doing God's will; not outwardly alone; it is the doing it from the heart. It is the doing it, not merely when it is pleasant to ourselves, but when it is painful to flesh and blood to comply.

How many beautiful instances of self-denying obedience do we perceive throughout the suffering career of the Lord Jesus! How self-denying was His obedience, when, knowing what He had been from all Eternity, He yet remained for thirty years at Nazareth, subject to

the will of His reputed parents!* How self-denying His obedience, when He submitted to be led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil; and, hungered as he was, would not supply His wants, but fed upon the precept of the Lord!† How self-denying His obedience, when, at the close of His career, His flesh shrunk from the cup of anguish that was brimming at His lips, but the cry that it might pass from Him was checked with the prayer, "Not my will, but thine be done!"‡

Such, dearly beloved, is the obedience of the true Christian. However the world may cry out against the doctrine of salvation of mere grace, as though it were opposed to good works, assuredly he, who believes and lives upon that doctrine, will aim at being the best servant, the most obedient child, the most useful citizen, the most tender parent, the most faithful friend. And, yet more, he will aim at being like Jesus, conformed in all things to God's will, and at doing whatever he does, in word or deed, all to the glory of God.§

III. Yet let us proceed to contemplate, in the third place, THE STATE OF PERFECTION, WHICH THE LORD JESUS ATTAINED THROUGH SUFFERING,

* Luke ii. 51. † Matt. iv. 1—4. ‡ Luke xxii. 42.
§ Col. iii. 17.

AND WHICH COMMENDS HIM AS A SAVIOUR TO A SUFFERING AND DYING WORLD.

"Being made perfect," saith our text, "He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him." Perfect, then, as the Lord Jesus was from all Eternity as God, the Creator of all things, the Lord of life, there was a perfection as Mediator which He could only attain by passing through a life of suffering and a death of shame. In order to be the High Priest our sinful souls require, it was necessary, not only that He should be "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners:"* but one in whose compassion for the ignorant, whose tenderness to them that are out of the way,† whose sympathy with the suffering, whose feeling for the tried, we might place unhesitating confidence. Surely the merest glance at the varied trials of His life and death may show us, how perfect He became in the experience of every variety of temptation, every species of suffering, and the bitterest form of death. The glorious event, whose praises still linger on our lips, gives us God's own certificate of His perfection, and commends the risen Saviour as a perfect Mediator—a High Priest for ever.

Having been thus made perfect, He became the author of *eternal* salvation,

* Heb. vii. 26.

† Heb. v. 2.

1. Because "by one offering" of Himself once offered, "*He hath perfected for ever* them that are sanctified."* In this, what a contrast between His priesthood and that of the Jewish High Priest! *He* made an offering for the people's sins once every year. The blood he offered could not wash out sin; it could not purge the sinner's conscience; it could not cleanse the sinner's heart. Year by year continually it must be offered; for, as soon as it had been offered, their guilt went on accumulating again. But the blood of Jesus, once offered, made complete satisfaction for the sins of men, past, present, and to come. Once truly sprinkled upon the conscience, it cleanses it for ever. He who comes and washes in that blood, is justified, is saved. He needs the continual exercise of faith to keep alive his interest in Jesus. He needs continual renewal by the Holy Spirit to make him meet for glory. But once washed in the blood of Jesus, he is clean every whit, justified from all his offences, passed from death unto life.

2. Because, having entered in with His own blood into the Holy place, *He there sits for ever at the right hand of God* pleading for His people, and sending forth out of the fulness that is treasured up in Him, the grace they need. "Wherefore

* Heb. x. 14.

He is able to save them to the uttermost," or for evermore, "that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for us."* Unlike the Jewish High Priest, who held his office for a little while, and then passed away, He "hath an unchangeable priesthood."† He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;"‡ and at whatever period, under whatever circumstances, in whatever need, the sinner goes to Him, he finds Him still the same Almighty, the same gracious, the same compassionate Saviour. Into His hands, as High Priest, all things are committed by the Father; and from Him flows forth upon His people, upon them that obey Him, a constant stream of grace, and tenderness, and love, supplying all their need, sustaining them in all their faintings, strengthening them in every conflict, saving them out of every evil. O! happy they who trust in such a Saviour. Well might the Apostle say: "If, when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."§

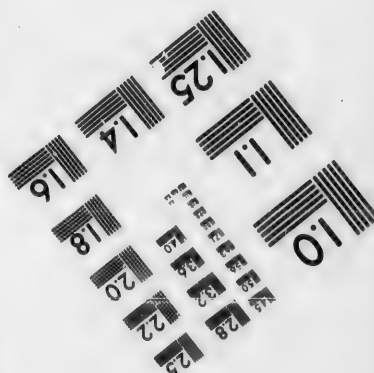
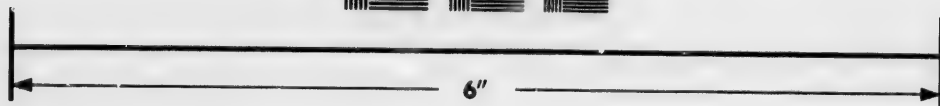
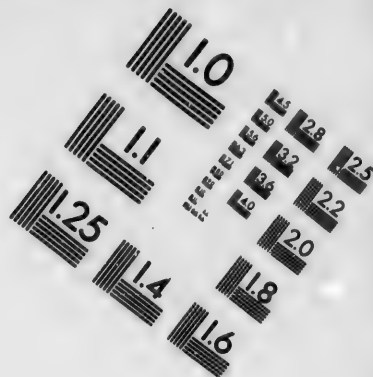
To resume, then, the reflections, with which we set out, Let us endeavor, dearly beloved, to learn,

1. From the previous glory of the blessed

* Heb. vii. 25. † Ib. 24. ‡ Heb. xiii. 8.

§ Rom. v. 10.





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Jesus, THE VALUE OF HIS OFFERING. Beloved, "We preach to you Christ crucified."* We desire to know nothing else among you, as the substance of our ministrations, but "Jesus Christ, and Him the crucified."† But, when we preach the cross of Christ, we preach that, which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."‡ And whence has it this power? Surely, because He, who is there lifted up in mortal agony, is the Eternal Son of the Eternal God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. If He were not so, if he were less than this, the sacrifice there offered could have been of no value to a ruined world. But being so, the blood He shed was abundantly meritorious to blot out a world's transgressions, precious enough to purchase the whole Church of God, pure enough to wash His people clean from sin. To Him, then, beloved fellow-sinners, ye are invited to look. Yea! from His cross the voice of His own love addresses you, "Look unto me, and be saved; for I am God, and there is none else."§ O! is there a sinner here, convinced of His sins; one, that has discovered himself to be a lost, a perishing transgressor; one that trembles at the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness, and earnestly cries out,

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

† 1 Cor. ii. 2.

‡ Rom. i. 16.

§ Isa. xlv. 22.

"What shall I do to be saved?" To thee, my fellow-sinner, even to thee, the voice of the Son of God expiring on the cross appeals; "Come, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*

2. From His deep humiliation, learn THE PRECIOUSNESS OF HIS SYMPATHY. It is not until we are in trouble that we feel the value of a friend. In hours of sunshine and of ease, there may be many of the passing acquaintances of the hour, who are more agreeable in conversation, more attractive in person, more polished in manner. But when the hour of adversity draws nigh, then it is felt to be a precious thing to have some friendly arm to lean upon that is willing to bear the weight, some friendly heart to which to confide our grief, assured of feeling, sympathy, and love. Yea, and how doubly precious at such times to have a friend who has passed through the same trials, encountered the same perils, experienced the same woes; and who can comfort us with the same comfort, with which, in the same tribulation, he has been himself comforted of God.† What then must be the comfort, to a sorrowing soul, of having such a friend as Jesus,

* Isa. i. 18.

† 2 Cor. i. 4.

on whom to lean in hours of grief? What trouble is there, through which He has not passed, and with which He has not learnt to feel? What sorrow can there be, which has not pressed on Him, and with which he has not learnt to sympathize? Beloved, who is there of you that is in any trouble; who of you is cast down by any tribulation? Surely to you, my fellow-sinner, the sympathy of Jesus offers sweet consolation, since he has passed through the same path of trouble, and encountered the same fight of afflictions. He comes, then, a sympathizing and a feeling friend, "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother;"* He bids you trust your griefs to Him; He invites you to pour your sorrows into His bosom. Go, then, go boldly unto Him; through Him approach a God of love: yea, through Him "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that ye may obtain mercy" to pardon, and "find grace, to help in every time of need."†

3. From the glory of His exaltation, learn THE SAFETY AND THE SECURITY OF THOSE THAT PUT THEIR TRUST IN HIM. The salvation which He has provided is an eternal salvation. No change affects the value of that blood once shed as the ransom of His people's souls. No time shall diminish the power of His advocacy, who

* Prov. xviii. 24.

† Heb. iv. 16.

pleads for His people's safety at the right hand of God. Yea, He is there Himself as the earnest, the surety, the forerunner of His people; and thence He sheds forth His grace and loving Spirit to keep, to strengthen, and to bless them. O! what then must be the security of those, who put their trust in Him! Beloved, are ye of those who obey His voice? It is of His grace, that ye have been led to hearken to Him; it is of His grace, that ye are saved; and His grace pledges to you a salvation which is eternal. "I am the good Shepherd," saith the blessed Jesus, "and know my sheep, and am known of mine. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."*

* John x. 27, 28.

SERMON X.

OUR HIGH PRIEST.

HEBREWS x. 19—22.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh ; and having an high priest over the house of God ; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

“SEE,” said the Lord to Moses, when giving him instructions concerning the service of the tabernacle and sanctuary, “See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount.”* The directions thus given were most minute and circumstantial ; nothing

* Heb. viii. 5.

whatever was left to the judgment or the fancy of the artist; but in the most seemingly trifling particulars, in the color of the threads, in a fringe, just as much as in the number of stones in the breast-plate, everything must be in strict accordance with the pattern, which the Lord had prescribed.

And there was a reason for this, beyond the mere purpose of the Lord to test the obedience of His servant. Every portion of the service of the Jewish sanctuary was intended to have an important significance with reference to the more spiritual service of the Christian dispensation. The purport of some of the directions given for the furniture of the tabernacle and sanctuary, we are unable even yet to explain; but in the far larger proportion, we perceive a shadowing forth of the leading features of the covenant of mercy in Christ Jesus, which throws out in clearer and stronger light the glowing characters, in which the provisions of that covenant are written in the record of the dying love of Jesus.

In no respect, however, is the precision and minuteness of the instructions by which Moses was guided, more remarkable, than in the directions which the Lord laid down concerning the office and functions of the priesthood. The peculiar privilege, bestowed upon the family of

Aaron, of coming into the presence of the glory of the Lord on behalf of their fellow-sinners; the highly-important duty, which devolved upon them, of receiving on the Lord's behalf the confessions of the people's sin, and then, on the people's behalf, laying this iniquity upon the head of the harmless victim, whose blood was offered in expiation of their guilt; the restrictions, solemn in their character and fearful in their sanctions, under which even this favored family were laid, in the exercise of their office of mediation between a sinful people and the holy Lord; these things are set forth to us with peculiar distinctness in the directory of the Jewish ritual, prescribed in the book of God.

The great object of the Apostle in writing to the Hebrews, seems to have been the proof, that all these appointments, with regard to the exercise of the Jewish priesthood in the family of Aaron, were intended as "shadows of good things to come;"* that they all found their accomplishment and their substance in the priesthood of Him, who, though not descended of the family of Aaron, is, by special appointment and consecration of God, "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."† Our view is at this time directed to His entrance upon the priestly office. Com-

* Heb. x. 1.

† Heb. vii. 17.

bin in His own divine person the character both of the sacrifice that was to be offered, and of the priest that offered it, the blessed Jesus, by His life of suffering and His death of shame, became the propitiation for our sins; and having risen again, and ascended into the heavens, He took on Him the office of the priest; and, bearing with Him His own precious blood, and presenting the incense of His own intercession, He ever liveth at the right hand of God, as the High Priest, the Friend, the Advocate of His people. Yes! beloved, the services of our Church at this time remind us, that "Christ is entered" as our great High Priest, "not into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us."* "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for us."†

Was the office of High Priest, as sustained by the family of Aaron, a deeply important, an indispensable office under the Jewish economy? How far more important, how yet more indispensable, is the office of the High Priest, as sustained by our blessed Lord, under the Christian dispensation! How awful were the

* Heb. ix. 24.

† Heb. vii. 25.

sanctions, by which the Lord guarded the exercise of the priesthood in Aaron's family against the invasion of those, who would claim an equal right with Him to offer incense before the Lord! And will the Lord's wrath be less fearful now against those, who would substitute other Mediators in the place of the Lord Jesus, or unite the saints and angels with Him in His peculiar work? How fearful was the revelation of God's wrath against any that should have dared to approach the Holy of Holies, to make their confessions or present their prayers, except in the person and through the mediation of Aaron or his sons! And is the Lord less an avenging God and a consuming fire against all those, *that*, rejecting the mediation of Jesus, think of coming to God in their own way, and according to their own devices? Yet how gracious, on the other hand, was the revelation of the Lord's glory in accepting the offering of the sprinkled blood, presented on the great day of expiation by the Aaronic priesthood! And how yet more gracious is the revelation of Himself, as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, which is now made to every sinner, that pleads the offering of the Lamb of God as the expiation for his sins! How cheering and consoling the promise of the Lord, that He would come down upon the mercy-seat, and hold gracious intercourse

at the appointed time with the Jewish High Priest, and through Him, with the people, whose sins had been laid upon the victim's head! How yet more comforting to the believer in Christ Jesus the privilege of drawing near at all times to the Father, and holding communion with Him by the Spirit, pouring out before Him the confessions, the cares, the conflicts, the sorrows of the soul, and hearing His gracious voice, speaking of peace in Jesus, holiness through the Spirit, happiness with God!

The grace and love of God in Christ Jesus, in opening to the sinner such a way of access to Himself; the consolation and the peace that are to be found in the enjoyment of communion with Him, through the mediation of our great High Priest; the confidence and the comfort, with which the believer in Jesus is encouraged to draw near, and accept from the loving-kindness of a gracious Father pardon for his sinfulness, strength for his weakness, help for his conflicts, and sympathy with his cares; these are the topics suggested for our meditation this day in the language of the text. Is there *a sinner* here, that needs pardon? I would invite him to come, and contemplate the way of access to a pardoning and gracious God. Is there *a sufferer* here, that needs sympathy and comfort?

I would invite him to come, and meditate upon the character of Him who is "a Friend, that sticketh closer than a brother."* Is there a *timid cast down soul* among us, that needs some encouragement to draw near with confidence to God? I would invite such a one to come, and behold the grounds there are, in the power of the intercession of Jesus, for boldness of approach to God. Is there a *worn and weary pilgrim* here, whose heart is well-nigh overborne with the cares and conflicts of this life of trial? I would urge that one to draw near, and see the warrant which he has for casting all his care upon the Lord, and receive the comfort which the word of Jesus gives, who is now at the right hand of God to succor and defend the soul, that flies in its distress to Him.

Beloved, let us entreat His grace and blessing, who "has ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, that the Lord God might dwell among them;"† let us beseech Him to send forth His ascension-gift, the gift of His Holy Spirit, upon us, to teach, to sanctify, to comfort, to abide in us. Let us beseech Him to manifest Himself now unto us, as He doth not unto the world, by coming and dwelling in us by His Spirit,‡ that we may have fellowship

* Prov. xviii. 24. † Ps. lxxviii. 18. ‡ John xiv. 22, 23.

with Him and with the Father, and daily grow in meetness for His presence amid the glories of His kingdom.

THREE THINGS seem to present themselves to our peculiar notice in the expression of the text. The first, THE PLACE, TO WHICH ACCESS IS OPENED; the second, THE WAY, BY WHICH ACCESS IS TO BE HAD; and the third, THE DISPOSITIONS, WITH WHICH ACCESS IS TO BE ENJOYED. May our meditation upon these points be sweet and profitable to our souls!

I. And first, THE PLACE, TO WHICH ACCESS IS OPENED, is spoken of in the text as THE HOLIEST, or the Most Holy place. This portion of the tabernacle and of the temple, which was reserved for the sole ministrations of the High Priest, and to which entrance was in the most awful manner forbidden, not only to the people generally, but even to the rest of the priestly family, is a well-known type of that holy place, which is the peculiar dwelling-place of Him, who "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto,"* and before whose throne angels and archangels veil their faces, while they worship Him. The privilege, however, upon which the Apostle dwells in the text, is the present privilege of the believer. The

* 1 Tim. vi. 16.

most holy place, then, to which access is now opened to the Christian, is not merely the presence of the Lord's glory in the world of sight, but also that communion with God, which constitutes to the believing soul a heaven upon earth, which is to the lively Christian the earnest and sweet foretaste of the blessedness of the eternal heaven.

1. First, then, the place, to which access is freely opened under the Christian dispensation, *is the spiritual enjoyment of God's presence*, the communion of the soul with Him in exercise of prayer and praise, the witness of His Spirit in the soul testifying to it of pardon, of peace, of acceptance with God, of an inheritance laid up for it with Him. Of this, whatever Abraham, whatever David, whatever Daniel, whatever Simeon may have enjoyed,—of this the people of the Jews in general seem to have had but little idea. Their religion was a service of forms and ceremonies, of sprinklings and ablutions, in the outward observance of which they generally rested, to the due performance of which the blessings of their temporal Canaan were annexed. And of this, it may be feared, a large portion of the nominally Christian world are too content to come short, placing their dependance also upon outward observances and ceremonies, resting in the mere external services of a Chris-

tian ritual. But the things, which "many prophets and kings desired to see, and saw not,"* were not the mere substitution of one set of ceremonies for another, but the enjoyment of that spiritual communion with God in all the ordinances and means of grace, which they saw not around them. The things, which "the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived,"† are not the mere formal exercises of the Christian ritual, but the intercourse of pardoned souls with a loving and gracious God, the communion of sanctified spirits with the Father of all their mercies and the God of all their comforts in Christ Jesus. And this, beloved, is THE HOLIEST, to which access is now opened to every believing soul. It is a sense of God's pardoning love; it is a desire for God's sanctifying presence; it is the enjoyment of a conscience purged from guilt; it is a delight in prayer and praise, as the outpouring of the soul's desire and gratitude to Him who is our Father; it is the witness of His Spirit with the believer's soul of its acceptance to His favor and His love; it is the sure and certain hope of an inheritance amid His joys. Surely the enjoyment of these things were heaven begun on earth; surely such communion as this with God

* Luke x. 24.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.

were a sweet, a blessed foretaste of the pleasures that are at His right hand for ever.

2. Secondly, the place to which access is now freely opened is *the immediate presence of the Lord in the enjoyment of eternal life in His kingdom*. And well may this be spoken of as the Most Holy place. Thither, where God dwells, "can enter nothing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they only that are written in the Lamb's book of life."* And can there, then, be access there for any of our guilty race? Conceived in iniquity, born in sin, going astray even from the womb, and daily and hourly transgressing against God, can any of our sinful generation find entrance there? O yes! the door is opened, the way of access freely set before us. It is no mere earthly Canaan, that opened its gates for our reception. Heaven itself, the place where Jesus our forerunner is entered, His Father's house, sets its wide portals open; and there is access thither, and there is room there, and there are pleasures there for evermore, for all that will but come by the one way, by which alone its gates can be approached.

II. THE WAY, BY WHICH ACCESS IS TO BE HAD,

* Rev. xxi. 27.

comes, in the second place, before our notice in the words of the text. This way is one,—the way which the Lord Jesus “hath consecrated for us;” but there are two particulars concerning that way, to which our attention is drawn in the text.

1. First, this “new way which He hath consecrated for us,” is “through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.” And by this is represented to us, that an essential, an absolutely necessary part of the way of a sinner’s approach to God, is *an atonement for his sins*. The holy place of the sanctuary of God, the spiritual presence of the Lord on earth, the presence of His glory in heaven, was veiled and clouded from the view of our fallen race because of the sin of man. It was sin, that caused the Lord to withdraw His presence from that once happy pair in Eden, with whom he He had walked and talked as a Friend. It was sin, that veiled the mercy-seat of God from the sight even of that people whom He had chosen for His own, and which made it necessary even for the High Priest, when he once in the year approached the mercy-seat, to sprinkle it with the blood of the slain bullock, lest he die.* It is sin, which still hides the light of God’s countenance from the souls of men, and causes even His believing people

* Lev. xvi.

sometimes to walk in darkness and have no light. But God "hath made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us;"* and at the moment when the agonies of Him, who hung as an accursed thing upon the tree, were closed, at that moment was the veil, which hid God's presence from the sinner, rent asunder, and the mercy-seat stood open to the sinner's view. How impressive must have been the sight to the worshipping assemblage in the Temple at Jerusalem. It was the hour of evening sacrifice. The priests were ministering at the altar of burnt-offering. The people bending low before the altar, in gazing upon which their eyes were turned towards the mysterious veil, within which they had never dared to look. Suddenly the earth quaked beneath them; the Temple walls were shaken; the veil burst asunder in an instant from top to bottom; and all again was still. And *there* stood revealed to every eye, the ark of the testimony resting upon the mercy-seat, above which the cherubim were bending with veiled faces, poring over the mystery of love, which that mercy-seat shadowed forth. And, blessed be God, never hath that veil been closed again. There stands the mercy-seat revealed to the sinner's view, and open to his approach; and thither, through the rent body of

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

the crucified Jesus,—thither, through the atoning blood of the slain, yet ever-living Jesus,—thither, to the presence, the favor, the blessing, the love of the Eternal God, through the sacrifice of His dear Son, is the way opened, by which every one that needs salvation may come, and be reconciled and at peace.

2. A second particular to be remarked in the way of access now opened to the mercy-seat of God is *the mediation and intercession of Jesus*. The mercy-seat indeed stands open for the sinner's approach, but it must still be sprinkled with the blood of the atonement. The way into the holiest is no longer closed; but, as even the high priest under the old dispensation dared not to pass within the veil, even on the appointed day, without a cloud of incense covering him, so neither may the sinner now venture near the Lord, but through the mediation and intercession of our great High Priest. God still sitteth upon a throne, though it be a throne of grace; and how shall a guilty rebel draw near the throne of his offended King without some mediator to present his plea, and sue for his acceptance? Sin is no less vile, because the Lord has provided so gracious a way for its pardon and cleansing; and how can one, who is stained with sin approach the holy God, without some one to sprinkle the atoning blood upon his con-

science, and to present the confession of his penitence to God? Sinful as we are, we need not only a prevailing plea for the pardon of our sins, which we have in the blood of Jesus: we need also some one to present that plea for us, and assure us of its acceptance with the Father. And THERE HE STANDS, THE ADVOCATE, THE INTERCESSOR, AND THE FRIEND OF SINNERS. He has gone "to appear in the presence of God for us."* He hath offered the Sacrifice, His own flesh, upon the altar of the cross. He hath taken the blood and gone with it into the most holy place. And there He pleads the merit of His gaping wounds; there He urges the value of His own finished work; there He presents the sweet savor of His own intercession for lost man; and obtains from Him, who always hears Him, salvation, holiness, and heaven for all, "that come to God by Him."†

III. Such, beloved, is the way. Access to the holiest is open. The atoning blood is shed. The High Priest has gone to appear before God for us. How shall we employ this privilege; how shall we use this liberty of approach to God? We are, in the third place, to consider THE DISPOSITIONS, WITH WHICH ACCESS TO GOD IS TO BE ENJOYED; the dispositions, which, beloved, in

* Heb. ix. 24.

† Heb. vii. 25.

greater or less degree, in weaker or more vigorous exercise, exist in all, who have truly found the way to God as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus.

1. The first thing the Apostle speaks of is, "a true heart;" by which I suppose him to mean *a sincere and honest purpose and intention* in the petitions which we offer to the Lord. Our Lord gives a sad description of many characters in His day, to whom He applies the words of Esaias, saying, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."* The disposition, which the Apostle speaks of, is the very opposite of this, the very opposite of that hypocrisy, that formalism, that self-satisfied spirit, which too often mark the ceremonious services of the world. Can he be said to draw near with a true heart to God, who bends before Him with the confession that he is a miserable sinner, yet has never been bowed down by the consciousness of sin, nor truly felt iniquity a burden? Does he draw near with a true heart to God, who asks for the pardon of sin, yet goes away unconscious of forgiveness, yea, careless and unconcerned about it? Does he draw near with a true heart to God, who comes and asks

* Matt. xv. 7, 8.

for grace to renounce the world, which yet he has no wish, no purpose to give up ; for grace to forsake sins, which yet he makes no effort, entertains no intention to subdue ? Nay, surely this is but a mockery of God. Gracious as the Lord is, He will not be mocked. How then should ye guard your thoughts, your desires, your hearts, when ye go into the presence of the Lord, that ye present not "the sacrifice of fools."* Are ye conscious of your sinfulness ; do ye feel your need of pardon ; do ye desire His grace to sanctify and cleanse you ? Then come, "come boldly"† unto Him ; the way is open ; "ye shall find rest unto your souls."‡

2. "Draw near," the Apostle, secondly, urges, "with the full assurance of faith ;" that is, come to God with *that full confidence in His love, and that persuasion of His willingness to save, which a lively faith in His promises and a trust in the mediation of Jesus is calculated to inspire* ; come to Him with that full confidence, which faith in Jesus alone can give. This disposition is opposed to that doubting spirit, against which St. James cautions those to whom he wrote. "If any man lack wisdom," he saith, "let him ask of God. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave

* Eccles. v. 1.

† Heb. iv. 16.

‡ Jer. vi. 16.

of the sea. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."* Can we wonder at this conclusion? Can we wonder that the man, who goes to the Lord for pardon of his sins, knowing that God has promised him pardon, yet doubting whether He will keep His promise, goes away unpardoned? Consider what grounds the sinner has for confidence in coming to the Lord. The Lord entreats him to come and be reconciled. He tells him that even his sins need not keep him back, for his sins have been laid upon "Him who knew no sin."† What more then can he need to encourage in him the confidence, that, if he do but come, he shall find the Lord a pardoning and a gracious God? Is he weak, helpless, suffering, prone to fall—yea, continually falling? He has a High Priest, who can be touched with the feeling of his infirmities, one who, even when he sins, is still his Advocate with God,‡ and who "ever liveth making intercession for us."§ What more then can he need to encourage the assurance of pardon, of peace, of strength in the Lord?

3. A third particular, which the Apostle urges upon those that draw near to God is, "*a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience.*" An evil

* James i. 7.

† 2 Cor. v. 21.

‡ 1 John ii. 1.

§ Heb. vii. 25.

conscience must be indeed an absolute impediment to any communion between the soul and God. When conscience troubles us with regard to any fellow-creature, we cannot be comfortable in his society. When Adam's evil conscience troubled him, he fled to hide himself among the trees, when he heard the Lord's voice in the garden. And yet how are vile sinners, such as we are, to draw near to God with a good conscience? Conscience may acquit us indeed of any injury against our fellow-man; but how dangerous must be our self-deceit, if conscience makes no charge concerning our duty towards God. How, then, can we get rid of an evil conscience? There is but one thing can cleanse us—the blood of Jesus. And here how vast the superiority of our High Priest to Aaron and his sons. The sprinkling of the blood they offered could never make the comers thereunto “perfect as pertaining to the conscience.”* But “the blood of Him, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purges the conscience from dead works to serve the Living God.”† Beloved, has that blood been sprinkled upon *your* conscience? Has the blood of Jesus cleansed *you* from all sin? Then may ye indeed draw nigh with confidence to God, since Jesus is the foundation of your hope.

* Heb. ix. 9.

† Ibid. 14.

4. And, once more, we are encouraged to draw near to God, having "our bodies washed with pure water." There is here, an evident allusion to the ablutions of the priests, who were commanded to wash in the brazen laver before entering upon any function of their office ;* to testify the necessity of *outward purity of conduct*, as well as of inward purity of heart, in those that serve the Lord. So St. James, encouraging us to "draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to us," adds the exhortation, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded."† The idea of having communion with God, and yet indulging the practice of any known sin, is well nigh blasphemous. Outward purity of life indeed is not religion ; but there can be no religion of the heart, no genuine communion of the soul with God, no interest in Jesus, no witness of the Spirit, in him who does not desire to shun even the "appearance of evil,"‡ to keep his hands from wickedness, and his lips from guile.

Taking, then, dearly beloved, the words of the Apostle in the text, as some guide to the nature of true communion with God, let me ask, Are there not those among you who know not what

* Exod. xxx. 18—21.

† James iv. 8.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 22.

it is to draw near to God in prayer? Some there are, it may be feared, who never even go through the form. Certain is it, that too many are present at our public services, who do not even join in the outward form of prayer; and yet these are persons whose only appearance of devotion is limited to their attendance at the sanctuary. Dear fellow-sinners, let me entreat you to ask yourselves this one question, What would ye do with yourselves, if by any possibility ye should find yourselves in heaven—in the presence of that God, whom ye have never worshipped, to whom ye have never prayed?

But it is not to these only, or chiefly, that we would appeal. Are there not those among you, who do go through the forms of public and of private prayer, and are attentive to the exercises of devotion, whose hearts yet testify to you, that ye have never drawn near to God in full assurance of faith, nor held communion with Him by the Spirit? Beloved, it is a mark of God's own selecting, by which the change in St. Paul from being the enemy of Jesus to being His servant was attested, "Behold, he prayeth!"* And there is nothing, which so distinguishes the converted man from his former self, as the difference between his once formal petitions, and

* Acts ix. 11.

the earnest outpourings of his heart to God. Beloved, the way is open ; liberty of access is set before you ; the rent body of Jesus reveals to you the mercy-seat ; He Himself stands waiting to receive your prayer, and present it to the Father ; O ! how long shall He wait in vain ? Beloved, if ye do not now draw near to "the holiest," if ye do not now enjoy communion with a reconciled God, through Jesus Christ, how can ye look forward to an entrance into those joys, which flow from His right hand for ever ?

Dearly beloved, ye who know something of the privilege of drawing near to God, do ye make the most of this privilege, do ye live in the enjoyment of it ? O ! how happy, and how holy might they be, who, having such a Friend as their High Priest and Advocate above, betook themselves to Him in every trial, cast upon Him every care, sought His strength against every temptation, and fled to Him for cleansing from every sin ! O ! what a foretaste might they thus enjoy, in the intercourse of their souls with the ascended Jesus, of the communion of the blest in heaven ! Beloved, the way into the holiest stands open ; Jesus is there to present your supplications and to plead your cause ; "All power is given to Him in heaven and in earth."*

* Matt. xxviii. 18.

Live upon Him now by faith; draw continually out of His fulness; and He will grant you an abundant entrance to the many mansions of His Father's house, whither He now is gone to prepare a place for His people.

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SERMON XI.

THE HOLY GHOST.

ACTS XIX. 2.

*Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ?**

NEXT in importance to the enquiry, Have ye received Christ Jesus? stands the momentous question of the text, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" To receive Christ is to receive the only ground of justification for the sinner's soul, to receive pardon, peace, acceptance with God, and our only title to the inheritance of His glory. To receive the Holy Ghost is to receive the only means of sanctification, to receive the moving spring of holiness within the heart, to receive our only meetness for the enjoyment of God's presence in his heavenly kingdom. An unpardoned sinner! how shall he stand before

* Preached on Whit-Sunday.

the judgment-seat of Him "who will bring every thought into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil?"* An unsanctified sinner! even if it were possible that such a one could have found the pardon of his sins, yet how could he stand in the light of His countenance, before whom "the heavens are not clean;"† how could he enjoy His presence, with whom nothing that is evil can dwell?‡

So important to this, and to every generation of mankind is the question, Have ye received the Holy Ghost? It was addressed by St. Paul to some disciples, whom he met at Ephesus, and who, having been attendants upon the ministry of John the Baptist, and by him baptized with the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, appear to have been uninstructed in the further development of the Christian dispensation, except that they had been for some brief period under the teaching of Apollos. Paul, returning from an extensive visitation of the Churches of Asia Minor, found these disciples at Ephesus; and referring, doubtless, to the extraordinary gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit, he enquired of them whether their faith had ever been confirmed, their spirits cheered, and their powers adapted to the work of making

* Eccles. xii. 13.

† Job xv. 15.

‡ Ps. v. 4.

known a Saviour's love, by their participation in the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Ghost. We need not enter into the nature of their reply; since it is not their answer, but our own to a similar question, which most intimately concerns us.

And well may we consider the services of our Church at this season, as addressing to us all, and to all that come within the sphere of her teaching, the very question of the text. This day those services commemorate the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This day our Church looks back upon the glorious season, at which the blessed Jesus, her glorious Head, having "ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men,"* shed forth upon His chosen few "the promise of the Father,"† and bathed them with the fire of holy inspiration to qualify them for their work as witnesses for Jesus. This day our Church looks back upon the wondrous result of the Pentecostal gift, when, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, who, when He came, convinced "the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment,"‡ some thousands of souls were presented as a first-fruits unto God, and gathered into the spiritual treasury of Christ. And can she look back upon such things as having

* Ps. lxxviii. 18.

† Acts i. 4.

‡ John xvi. 8.

marked her past, her early history, and not derive from the review some present lesson for her children? Can she look back upon the out-pouring of the Spirit, as the characteristic feature of the present dispensation, and not earnestly enquire, whether those who are now enclosed within her pale are partakers of this glorious gift? Can she look back upon the wonderful result of the first preaching of the cross, when the Holy Ghost applied the sermon, and brought home its message to poor sinners' hearts, and not anxiously enquire of all, who sit from Sabbath to Sabbath under the ministry of the word, whether the Holy Ghost hath ever applied the message to their souls, and causing the word to take root within them, hath cherished it into fruitfulness unto the praise and glory of the Lord? Nay! let us not so charge our Church with neglect of the important lessons, which the great features of this dispensation are calculated to enforce. She comes to us in the name of her great and gracious Head, and at this time addresses to us, to each and all her children, the solemn question, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" *Believers in Jesus*, are ye bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit? *Children of the world*, hath not the Spirit yet convinced you of sin? *Halters between the two*, are ye still going on to grieve the Holy Ghost?

Cast down and desponding, has not the Comforter yet come to you? *Lukewarm professors*, have ye received the Holy Spirit? *Humble followers of Jesus*, does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that ye are the children of God?

These are some of the enquiries, which, according to the different state and circumstances of the persons addressed, may be considered as included in the question of the text, Have ye received the Holy Ghost? Beloved, can we then over-estimate the importance of that question? Not unless we can over-estimate the value of our souls, the importance of Eternity, the necessity of holiness in all that would see the Lord. Let us consider it, then, I pray you, in its bearing upon ourselves, and pray, that the blessed Jesus will send forth the promise of the Father upon us to guide, to direct, to teach, and to bless us in our meditations upon this important subject.

It can hardly be necessary at this time to dwell upon the divinity, and distinct personal agency of the Holy Ghost. They, it may be hoped, are few indeed who have any doubt upon this momentous doctrine, compared with what is, it must be feared, the number of those, who are practically insensible of their need of His agency upon their hearts, who are ignorant of any operation of the Spirit of God upon their

own souls. To this point, then, let us direct our attention, and consider, with a view to present edification, first, THE NECESSITY; secondly, THE NATURE; and thirdly, THE EFFECT OF THE OPERATION OF THE HOLY GHOST, in carrying out that momentous portion of the great scheme of man's salvation, which is more especially committed in the counsels of Eternity to His Divine agency. And may the power of the Holy Spirit be among us, to sanctify and apply the Word!

I. Consider, then, beloved, in the first place, THE NECESSITY WHICH EXISTS FOR YOUR RECEIVING THE HOLY GHOST.

1. This necessity arises, first, from *the utter corruption of our nature*, its entire alienation from God, its total depravity. "The condition of man after the fall," saith the Tenth Article of our Church, "is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God." So far gone is he from his original condition, that he cannot even believe the message which God sends to him in His holy word: he cannot even pray to God, or with any acceptance call upon His name. Such is the doctrine of our Church; and such, most clearly and abundantly, is the doctrine of the Bible. "We are all as an unclean thing," says one prophet, "and all our

righteousnesses are as filthy rags.”* “Can the Ethiopian change his skin,” asks another, “or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”† For, says he again, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”‡ “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,”§ saith our blessed Lord to Nicodemus. “The flesh,” saith an Apostle, “lusteth against the Spirit;”|| yea, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”¶

And yet, notwithstanding this impossibility in the way of man’s doing anything of himself to make himself pleasing in the sight of God, it is not less clearly stated, that man must believe, he must repent, he must obey, he must be made holy,—or he cannot by any possibility enter into the kingdom of God. The natural aversion of man to the things of God must be subdued; his enmity must be changed into love; his indifference warmed into affection; his unbelief give way to a lively faith; and his worldliness be supplanted by an earnest and a purifying hope of an inheritance in God’s glory. And how can this be done? Man is not only naturally *unable*, he is naturally *indisposed* to effect this change in himself. Surely, then, here is a plain, a palpable

* Isa. lxiv. 6.

† Jer. xiii. 23.

‡ Ib. xvii. 9.

§ John iii. 6.

|| Gal. v. 17.

¶ Rom. viii. 8.

necessity for a superior, a divine influence, the influence of the Holy Spirit, to lay the very commencement of such a work in the sinner's heart. Man cannot even think a really good thought, but as the Holy Spirit puts it into his heart. How needful, then, how indispensable His influence to all that would be saved!

2. Yet the enquiry of the text is addressed to those, in whom the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit had already been exercised, in leading them to faith in Christ; and we may perceive from it, secondly, a necessity for the gift of the Holy Spirit, arising from *the utter helplessness of man*, even the regenerate and believing man, to do anything of himself to the glory of the Lord that bought him. The question of the text may indeed be said to refer to the miraculous operations of the Holy Spirit, and to have been intended to ascertain, whether the Ephesian disciples had ever yet been endowed with the gift of tongues, and other extraordinary powers vouchsafed to believers in that early age. Yet the language of St. Paul, in writing to the Ephesian Church, compared with his expressions both to the Romans and the Corinthians, wherein he speaks to them of having been, after they believed, "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,"* may show us the propriety of such a

* Eph. i. 13.

question at every age of the Church, and the necessity of some larger and more abundant measure of the Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts, and to sanctify the lives of those, to whom already it has been given to believe. It was not only as a wonder-working power, that the presence of the Holy Spirit was promised to the disciples, from whom the Lord Jesus was soon to be separated. It was promised, that He should be with them as a teacher and remembrancer,* that He should abide with them as a Comforter,† that He should be a witness to them of Jesus,‡ that He should be in them a Spirit of adoption.§ And is the necessity less pressing, in the case of believers in every age, than it was for the immediate followers of the blessed Jesus, that they should have the continual teaching, and presence, and comfort, and indwelling of the Spirit of God to carry on the Lord's work within their hearts? Too many there are, who almost seem to think, that, if they have once believed in Jesus, the work is done; that, if they have only fled as sinners to the Saviour, and by faith laid their sins upon Him, they are safe. But this is but the commencement of that life of godliness, which is spoken of as a struggle, a warfare, a race. And if nothing

* John xiv. 26.

† Ib. 16.

‡ Ib. xv. 26.

§ Rom. viii. 14, 15.

but the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit could have disposed them to enter upon that conflict, to engage in that race ; much more can nothing but the continual grace of the Holy Spirit sustain them amid its trials, and bring them out " more than conquerors, through Him that loved them."

From first to last, then, in the work of salvation, as carried on in the soul of the sinner, all is of the operation of the Holy Spirit of God. His grace alone it is, which puts into the heart of any sinful man the first anxious thought about his soul, the first earnest desire for salvation, the first purpose and intention of seeking Jesus as a Saviour. His grace alone it is, which carries on the anxious thought, and turns the earnest desire into a prayer ; which draws the sinner to the cross of Christ, sprinkles upon his conscience the atoning blood, and assures him of an interest in the Father's love. His grace alone it is, which strengthens the believer to renounce the world, enables him to cast off the bondage of the flesh, and gives him victory over the devices of the Devil. How important then, beloved, on the ground of its absolute necessity to your salvation—how important the enquiry, " Have ye received the Holy Ghost ?"

II. Let us consider, in the second place,

beloved, THE NATURE OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY GHOST.

In that wonderful effusion of the Holy Spirit, to which our thoughts are turned at the present season of our Church, the mode of His operation was as perceptible as its effects. For while the disciples "were all with one accord in one place," upon the day of Pentecost, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting; and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them."* But with regard to His more ordinary operations, their nature is, as clearly as we can comprehend it, set before us in the words of our Lord to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."†

1. And in taking this, our Lord's, exposition of the matter for our guide, we are led to observe, first, *the sovereignty* of the operations of the Spirit. The wind bloweth where it listeth. It knows no human control; it can be brought within no human regulations. It acknowledges no will but His, who brings forth the winds out of His treasures, and whose word the wind and

* Acts ii. 3.

† John iii. 8.

storm fulfil.* And so, whatever varieties of gifts, of operations, of ministrations there may be in the Church of Christ, "all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally AS HE WILL."† Such an expression as this, while it clearly indicates the distinct and personal agency of the Holy Spirit in the work of the sinner's salvation, does not of course intimate any distinctness of will from the purpose of the Father and the Son. For just as the blessed Jesus gave us one of the strongest assertions He could employ to express His full Divinity, when He said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do;"‡ so we may, without impropriety, say of the Holy Ghost, The Spirit can do nothing of Himself, but what He knoweth to be the will both of the Father and of the Son. All the passages of Scripture, then, which speak of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of souls, may be well applied as indications of the nature of the operations of the Spirit. It is the operation of the Spirit that is described, when St. Paul assures the Philippians, that "it is God that worketh in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure."§ It is the operation of the Spirit, as the Agent in the work of the soul's salvation, that is

* Ps. cxxxv. 7 ; cxlviii. 8.

† 1 Cor. xii. 11.

‡ John v. 19.

§ Phil. ii. 13.

implied in the assertion of the Saviour, that "as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will."* And if man be so corrupt, as we have seen him described to be, if he be so powerless even to think a good thought, what can it be but an act of sovereign and of special grace, that awakens the sinner to reflection, convinces him of his lost condition, and draws him in prayer and supplication to the throne of grace?

2. A second point, which our Saviour's parable of the wind suggests concerning the mode of the Spirit's operations is, that *they are invisible*. Nothing can be more secret, more hidden from the observation of our fellow-man, than the rising of the first thought about the soul's concerns in the sinner's mind; nothing more unperceived and more unexpected by ourselves, and more difficult in many cases afterwards to trace, than the first real anxiety about our salvation, the first small beginnings of grace, leading the soul to Christ. The thought, perhaps, intrudes among the multitude of other thoughts, that we must die; that there is an Eternity before us; that we are unprepared to die; that Eternity holds out to us, in our present state, no prospect but of endless woe. We strive to get rid of the thought; we try to hush it in the whirl of busi-

* John v. 21.

ness; we try to drown it in the noise of worldly mirth: but still it will recur; it will not be silenced; it takes possession of the soul. Perhaps some message from the preacher's lips stirs up reflection. It may be that annoyance was at first the chief feeling it excited; that we were vexed with ourselves for even allowing it to take such a hold upon our minds; that we were angry with the instrument whom the Lord employed to address His word to our hearts; that we were determined to put it from us, and be disturbed by it no more. But the word would still recur; the value of the soul would force itself upon the mind; the necessity of a change of heart could not be gainsaid; and the soul at last, after resisting to the utmost, has been constrained to fall low at the feet of Jesus, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?" These thoughts are, at first, not only kept secret from the world; we try to hide them even from ourselves; but if they be the suggestions of the Spirit, they will take deeper and firmer hold upon the mind, till they produce at last the complete surrender of the heart to God.

Such thoughts as these indeed, in their first stage, are frequently the suggestions of mere natural conscience, independently of any teaching of the Spirit. At this early period, the genuine operation of the Spirit is not easily dis-

tinguished. It is by its permanence alone, by its continued and steady influence, that the Spirit's work is seen. The mere scruples of natural conscience are easily silenced in the whirl of pleasure or of care; the mere reasonings of the natural mind about eternal things are soon superseded by the cares of this world and the thoughts of other things; but when the Spirit is at work, the anxieties He awakens, the fears He excites, the reflections He stirs up, go on increasing their hold, till the sinner is subdued to Christ.

3. For, a third thing, in which we may trace the resemblance that has been referred to, is in *the effect produced*. We know not beforehand in what quarter the wind will next arise; we see not the color of the blast, even when it is sweeping over us; but we doubt not that the wind is blowing, though we see it not: we perceive it often for a long time afterwards, by the effects it has produced. And we may trace the operation of the Spirit, wherever He has been truly at work in the sinner's heart, in the effects which He produces. For we are "confident of this one thing, that He, which hath begun a good work" in the soul, "will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."* "His work is perfect."† It is not like Him to awaken a

* Phil. i. 6.

† Deut. xxxii. 4.

soul, to quicken it, to lead it to Jesus, to convert it by His Spirit, and then to leave it to be cast out.

III. WHAT THE EFFECTS ARE, however, which flow from the receiving of the Holy Spirit, we come now, in the third place, to consider.

1. And the first we shall observe is *the conviction of sin*. When the Spirit of truth commences His work in the sinner's heart, He produces a deep and serious and abiding conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. By this I do not mean merely a state of terror and alarm on account of the fearful consequences of sin; a horrible apprehension and dread of the vengeance due, and denounced against transgression. This is a means, which the Spirit sometimes uses for the accomplishment of His gracious work; but it is not unfrequently the operation of mere natural conscience, which quickly passes away with the circumstances that awoke the alarm, with the sickness or the danger which aroused the fears. But the effect of the operation of the Spirit is seen, even when he acts this way first upon the fears, in producing in the soul such a view of sin, of its exceeding vileness in the sight of God, of the pollution with which it has defiled the soul, of the anguish which it has inflicted upon Christ, and the price at which

alone He could redeem the soul from its bondage, as to cause the sinner to roll himself in the dust of self-abasement before God, as a loathsome and polluted thing. General as appears to be the acknowledgment that we are all sinners, general as might appear to be in some sense the conviction of sin, there is nothing in which man's views differ more than in their estimate of the sinfulness of sin. For while one seems to think all sin a light thing; another shrinks only from those heinous sins, which invade his neighbour's property or peace; another would see no evil in sin, were it not that it is threatened with eternal punishment;—the soul convinced by the Spirit of God abhors even the thought of sin, and loathes itself in its own sight for all its unbelief, and hardness of heart before God.

2. Secondly, the Holy Spirit, where He is carrying on His work in the soul, *testifies to it of Christ*. Having, first, convinced the soul of sin, He next convinces it of righteousness. He brings the sinner to the cross of Christ; He subdues the enmity which exists in the natural heart against the doctrine of Christ Jesus the crucified; He applies to the trembling soul the gracious message of a Saviour's love; He enables the sinner to bring the burden of his sins to Jesus, to lay them upon His head, and go in peace. All this may have been clearly perceived

with the understanding; but it is the Spirit of God alone, that can apply it to the heart. Men may see and know that they are sinners; they may see and know that there is no salvation for the sinner but in the blood of Jesus; they may see and know, that the sinner who truly believes in Jesus finds pardon and peace; but it is the Spirit of the Lord alone, who can enable us, each one for himself, to bring our burden to the cross of Christ, and leave it there; and send us on our way rejoicing in a sense of God's pardoning mercy, and of our own acceptance in Jesus the Beloved.

3. And, thirdly, wherever the Holy Spirit thus testifies of Jesus, He also *sanctifies the soul*, that under His guidance comes to Christ. And this sanctification of the soul is what may in a peculiar measure be spoken of as the work or fruit of the Spirit. It is His work above all things to subdue the evil that is in our nature, to overthrow the dominion of sin in our hearts, to set up the throne of God within us, to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It is His work, more especially, to quicken the soul from its sleep of sin, to arouse it and stir it up to a new and holy life, to implant a new principle in the soul, to shed abroad the love of Christ in the heart, to renew the soul in righteousness after the image of Him that

created it. It is His work, in short, since Jesus by His death had opened to the sinner the way to eternal life,—it is the work of the Spirit to make the soul that comes to Jesus fit to dwell in His presence, and to enjoy His love for ever.

Is it not then, beloved, let me again enquire, is it not an important question which the text addresses to every soul among you, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" Ye have seen, I trust, the necessity which exists for the operation of this Holy Spirit upon your hearts; ye have traced in some measure the nature of His operations; your attention has been pointed to some of the effects of His indwelling; O! let me beseech you to enquire, as before the Lord, Have ye received the Holy Ghost?

What answer will your souls give to the enquiry, ye who are going on in carelessness and worldliness and sin? Will ye point to the grace of your baptism as the answer? Yet let me remind you, beloved, of our Lord's own words, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* If, then, ye have been truly born of the Spirit, ye will have become spiritual, ye will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in your hearts and lives. And is this so with you, beloved? Is your care-

* John iii. 6.

lessness about your souls a fruit of the Spirit? Is your love of the world, its vanities and toys, a fruit of the Spirit? Is your weariness of the Sabbath, your neglect of God's Word, your backwardness to prayer, your coldness in the pursuit of heaven—are these things fruits and evidences of the Spirit's indwelling? O no! beloved! whatever may be your privileges as members of a Christian Church, be assured, that, "if ye have not the Spirit of Christ, ye are none of His;"* be persuaded to seek that Spirit from Him, who "ascended up on high, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them."†

Are there not those among you, beloved, who, if the question of the text were addressed to you, may readily be imagined adopting the reply of the Ephesian disciples, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost."‡ Ye have heard of it with the hearing of the ear; ye believe the doctrine of His existence in the Trinity of the Godhead; but practically ye know nothing of His influence, ye are ignorant of His indwelling. It may be, then, that ye are going on in heedless wickedness; it may be that ye are toiling on in your own strength, striving to work out your own salvation. But in either

* Rom. viii. 9.

† Ps. lxviii. 18.

‡ Acts xix. 2.

case ye cannot be enjoying peace with God ; ye cannot be truly united to Jesus ; ye can have no witness in your heart of your being children of God. Dearly beloved, let the enquiry of the text awaken you to a sense of the importance of the question, whether ye have received the Holy Ghost. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."*

Dearly beloved, are there those among you, who can humbly trust that ye have received the Spirit of God, convincing you of sin, testifying to you of Jesus, sanctifying your souls? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."† By the fruit shall it be known, whether ye have received the Holy Ghost or not. Beloved, the Lord hath chosen you "to be a holy people to Himself."‡ Jesus hath redeemed you to be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works."§ The Spirit sanctifieth you, to be a spiritual people. O! "grieve not then the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."|| "Walk in the Spirit: so shall ye not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."¶ "the fruit of the Spirit is

* Rom. viii. 9, 14.

† Gal. v. 22.

‡ Deut. xxviii. 9.

§ Tit. ii. 14.

|| Eph. iv. 30.

¶ Gal. v. 16.

in all goodness, and righteousness and truth."*
If ye are led by the Spirit of God, then are ye
the sons of God ; walk as children of God here ;
that ye may be meet to dwell with Him as His
children for ever.

* Eph. v. 9.

SERMON XII.

THE LOVE OF THE BRETHREN A SIGN OF LIFE.

1 JOHN III. 14.

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.

“HE that hath the Son hath life,” saith the same Apostle ; “and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”*

There surely cannot be a more important statement, demanding the attention of immortal beings, than that which is involved in the proposition here set forth. In the vast multitude of human beings, that people the world which we inhabit, there are some who are alive in the fullest sense and meaning of the word ; there are some who are dead while they live. And in this difference in the condition of mankind, there are consequences involved, which are not limited

* 1 John v. 12.

and determined by the narrow bound which compasses mere earthly things, but stretch into Eternity. They, who are dead while they live, are in a state which leads to the worm which dieth not, and the fire which never shall be quenched. They who are alive unto God have an earnest and a foretaste here below of that eternal life, in which is joy and happiness unspeakable for ever and ever.

Now, beloved, in one or other of these states, and tending to one or other of these ends, is every soul here present in this house of God this day. Ye, dear friends and brethren, all of you are either alive unto God this day, or ye are dead while ye live: ye are either in the narrow pathway of heaven, or ye are on the broad high-road, that leadeth to destruction. Awful alternative this! And yet, if there be one thing, which the Word of God sets before us more plainly than another, it is this solemn truth. And does it propose no tests, does it set up no marks, by which we may ascertain in which state we are; by which we may decide upon our present condition; by which we may verify our hopes, concerning the future? Most surely yes. The tests by which these things may be ascertained are abundant and plain, in proportion to the vast importance of the matter that is to be known; the marks by which our condition may

be decided, are clear as those by which health may be distinguished from disease, or life be discerned from death.

And there is none of the holy men of God, whose writings, according "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,"* are contained in the blessed book, who has proposed more plain and searching tests for this great purpose than the beloved disciple of our Lord. The text contains one, which, though not perhaps as deep and as discriminating as some others which the same Apostle has set up, will be found of no trifling value in determining the soul's condition before God. "We know," saith the Apostle in the text, "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

In taking these words, however, as the guide of our meditations this afternoon, I would not limit your attention to the test of character thus proposed, but would invite your serious and attentive consideration to the whole subject thus brought before us. It may be that there are some, even in this nominally Christian congregation, who yet need to be convinced of the necessity and nature of the change that is referred to in the text. May the Spirit of the Lord bless our present meditation to their conviction of the truth! It may be that there are

* 2 Peter i. 21.

some here, who question the possibility of our having a present consciousness of our salvation. May the same blessed Spirit convince them of this by giving them this knowledge in their own inmost hearts! It may be that there are some, who, feeling the necessity of the change referred to, desire earnestly to know whether they have yet experienced it. May the same gracious Spirit apply the subject before us to their hearts, as one of many means of ascertaining, whether they are among the children of the Lord, or no!

The subject, then, beloved, which the text brings before us, is, first, THE CHANGE referred to in the words, "We have passed from death unto life;" secondly, the Christian's CONSCIOUSNESS OF THIS CHANGE, "*We know* that we have passed from death unto life;" and, thirdly, THE TEST, to which this consciousness must be brought, "Because we love the brethren." May the God of love and peace be with us, and fill us with His Spirit to the glory of Jesus for ever!

I. And, in the first place, let us consider briefly THE CHANGE expressed in the words, "We have passed from death unto life." There is implied in them *a change of condition, and a change of character.*

1. And, first, *a change of condition.* The death they speak of is a state of condemnation and

of curse, and exposure to the fearful vengeance of a just and jealous God. The life they speak of is a state of pardon and of peace with God, of deliverance from condemnation, and of title to the inheritance of eternal glory laid up at God's right hand for ever. Now, the believer is one, who, through faith in the Son of God, has been transferred from an accursed condition, a state of condemnation to everlasting wrath, into a state of peace with God, a condition in which a righteousness has been provided for him, which forms his abundant title to "the inheritance of the saints in light." Our Lord Himself uses the expression of the text in describing this change of condition. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."* Let it ever be remembered, beloved, that the state in which man is born into the world is a state of condemnation. The more popular notion is, that the mind of man at his birth is like a pure sheet of paper, ready to receive impressions either of good or evil; that the soul of man is suspended, as it were, between two conditions, free to choose a state of condemnation or a state of peace. But this notion, whatever the human

* John v. 24.

authority upon which it rests, is foolishness with God. The mind of the new-born child is already blotted and defaced by inclinations and propensities to sin; the soul of the merest infant is already under condemnation, because of the sin in which it is born. To come into condemnation, then, requires no effort, no choice, no determination; let but the sinner go on, unchanged, in his natural condition, and the state of condemnation in which he lies will ere long merge in the blackness of darkness for ever. Would he be saved, he must come out of this state; he must fly by faith to Jesus; he must be delivered by the power of God from this state of condemnation; the blood of Jesus must be sprinkled upon his conscience, cleansing it from guilt; he must put on the righteousness of Jesus; he must lay hold upon Eternal life. This is the change of condition expressed in the words, "We have passed from death unto life."

2. And they, secondly, imply *a change of character*. To pass from death unto life is to pass from a state of spiritual slumber, of carelessness about the soul's concerns, of deadness in trespasses and sins, into a state of anxiety about the soul, of activity in the service of God, of devotedness of body, soul, and spirit to the glory of Christ; it is, in short, to be converted to God. The word of grace continually speaks of

this change in terms similar to those of the text. And nature, especially at this season,* abounds with illustrations of the change thus described. Go, place yourself, for instance, beside the shallow waters of some running stream, and, as you gaze into the pellucid rill, you will often see lying upon the sands over which it flows, what looks like a small shapeless fragment of a shattered tree. There is no sign of life about it, and the only thing in it to excite a passing expression of surprise, is that it lies there motionless upon the sandy bottom, instead of flowing down the surface of the stream. Look again in a few days, and you will perceive this shapeless mass instinct with life. There is a living creature protruding from the cumbrous casing, and struggling to shake off the clog that keeps it down. Yet again a little while, and the clog will be shaken off, and you will see the glorious insect expanding its transparent wings in the warm sun-beam, that tinges them with its prismatic hues. The Spirit of God, that moved at the first upon the deep, still broods upon the face of the waters, and causes them thus to teem with energy and life. And just such the change, that is wrought by the power of the same Spirit in the soul that passes from death unto life. Until the

* The month of June.

Spirit of the Lord applies the Word of truth, the man is dead. There is indeed the principle of life, the living soul, within ; but it is blind to its true interests, dead to the service and the love of God, clogged with the cares and pleasures of a sinful flesh and an ensnaring world. But when the Spirit of the Lord begins His work, the struggle of the soul commences. It groans under the bondage of the flesh ; it struggles to shake off the shackles of the world ; it strives, it pants, it labors to be free. Sometimes it is a tedious struggle ; sometimes the deliverance is more speedy ; but in the Lord's good time, the liberated soul casts off the bondage that so long had chained it to the world, and rises on the wings of prayer and praise, and lives in the purer atmosphere of heavenly communion, and enjoys the sunshine of a reconciled Father's face.

Here then is a change, not only in privilege, but in character and conduct. From being a bondsman of sin, to be a willing servant of God ; from being the slave of the world, to be the Lord's freeman ; from being dead in carelessness and worldliness and sin, to be alive unto God, a new creature in Christ Jesus ;—oh ! surely here is a change, which fits the soul for the inheritance prepared for it ; which wakes rejoicings among the angels of God ; and in which the

blessed Jesus sees the travail of His soul, and, seeing it, is satisfied.*

II. And can this change take place, let us, next, enquire, can this change have taken place in the soul, and the soul be unconscious of it? No! of those who have experienced the conversion of the heart to God, it is here affirmed, "We KNOW that we have passed from death unto life."

Let us first, briefly, ask, *Is it not reasonable* that it should be so? Can the glittering insect be unconscious, so far as its powers of consciousness extend, of the difference between the life it now enjoys, and the state of torpor and of death from which it sprang? Does not the reply of the blind man in the gospel commend itself to us at once, as a triumphant answer to all the cavils of the Pharisees, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see?"† Was not the leper, that returned to give glory to God, aware of his having been cleansed?‡ Or was not Lazarus aware, as he sat at table with Jesus in Bethany, of the change that had passed over him, when, at the word of this same Jesus, he had come forth alive from the tomb, in which he had lain four days, a lifeless corpse?§ And is it less reason-

* Isa. liii. 11.

† John ix. 25.

‡ Luke xvii. 12—19.

§ John xi. and xii. 1, 2.

able to suppose, that a soul, which had been blinded by sin, but has been enlightened by the Spirit; which had been under the curse of God, but has found pardon and peace with Him; which had been the slave of the world, and dead in trespasses and sins, but has been led to renounce the world, to follow after holiness, to seek the Lord, to live for eternity, to have the conversation in heaven, should be conscious of the mighty change wrought in him by the Spirit of the Lord? O, surely, if there be any reality in the change, the soul, that has passed through it, must be aware of it.

2. And if it be reasonable to suppose thus, *is it not also scriptural?* "We know," saith the Apostle, "that we have passed from death unto life." There are, alas! those, whose aim it seems to be to strike from the believer's lips the cup of cheering consolation, whose sweetness is derived from the assurance of God's love for him in Christ Jesus, from the enjoyment of a present interest in Jesus, and the witness of the Spirit with his spirit, that he is a child of God. But the Lord Jesus Himself continually speaks of the salvation of the soul as a present salvation: "Whosoever believeth HATH everlasting life."* And His Apostles use the same language: "By Him all that believe are justified from all

* John vi. 47.

things.”* “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.”† And they not only lay down this doctrine, they enjoy the comfort of it themselves, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”‡ “We know, that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God.”§ “We know that we are of God,” saith St. John, “and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”|| “Hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.”¶ Surely then it is as scriptural, as it is reasonable, that he who has passed from death unto life should be conscious of the change; that he, who has renounced the world and been converted to God, should have some evidence of his conversion; that he, in whom the Spirit of God has taken up His dwelling, should have some witness of the Spirit, that he is a saved sinner, and an heir of glory.

III. Yet, beloved, while the Scriptures of truth minister this consolation in abundant measure to the true believer in Jesus, they supply us also with ample means of distinguishing between that living faith on which assurance should be based, and those delusions

* Acts xiii. 39.

† Rom. v. 1.

‡ Rom. viii. 16.

§ 2 Cor. v. 1.

|| 1 John v. 19.

¶ Ib. iii. 24.

of fancy, by which too many have at all times been ready to deceive themselves into the idea of their being accepted of the Lord. The Scriptures warrant no assurance of faith distinct from the fruits of faith; they sanction no inward evidence which will not stand those outward tests, by which a genuine faith is proved. Let your attention, beloved, be directed, in the third place, to THE EVIDENCE which the text suggests, by which our having passed from death unto life may be ascertained: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

1. And we remark, first, under this head, that in general *the love of others*, the love of our neighbor as ourselves, is a good sign of our having experienced a work of grace in our hearts. Self-love is so strong a passion of our nature, and so generally, so almost universally, prevalent throughout our race, that the subduing of this passion, and the setting up within our hearts of a lively interest in the welfare of our fellow-creatures, is in general an evidence that some better principle has been at work than any which our corrupt nature can supply. Yet there is, on the one hand, in some cases, a kindness and benevolence, the fruit of a natural amiability, which, pleasing as it is, is no evidence of the conversion of the heart; and it is, on

the other hand, easy to deceive ourselves with the idea that we love others, as ourselves, when perhaps, like the young man in the gospel, we should go away grieved* from the very first proof to which our love might be put. We must therefore look for some clearer evidence than a mere general amiability would supply, of our being the children of God.

2. And such an evidence, we secondly observe, is supplied us by the text, which points us to *the love of the brethren*, as a proof of our own conversion to God. And who are the brethren here spoken of? Not merely brethren in Adam, but brethren in Christ. The brethren are all that have been begotten again of God; "all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;"† all that have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, and are bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit in their lives. He that is begotten again of God is a new creature; and "every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him."‡ There are those, alas! who profess to have passed from death unto life, who seem willing to recognise none as brethren in Christ Jesus, but those that bow down at the same altar, and worship within the same walls. There are those, alas! who would shut out such men as Watts, and Doddridge, and Baxter, and Whit-

* Mark x. 22. † Ephes. vi. 24. ‡ 1 John v. 1.

field from the family of God, and leave men who have been burning and shining lights, and at whose feet they would do well to sit, only to the uncovenanted mercies of the Lord, to which the untutored Heathen is consigned. Yet surely the lively believer will see a brother in the Lord in every one who here clings to the same cross, and walks in the same spirit as he does himself—in every one of whom he cannot doubt that he shall sit down hereafter in the family of God among the many mansions of our Father's house. It is a sign of a converted heart, when we can love a Christian wherever he is found; and, like the Apostle of the Gentiles, can cordially invoke the grace and blessing of the Lord upon "all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Such fellowship as this comes nearest to that union which our Lord desired among His followers, and to which He knew the world would appeal for an evidence of their discipleship. There may be much of outward unity, where there is but little love in the spirit. It is the union of hearts, the love which believers have one for another, their fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,* which is the evidence of our having passed from death unto life.

3. Yet we must, thirdly, observe, that even

* 1 John i. 3.

the love of the brethren is only an evidence of a converted heart, when we love them *because of their being the children of God*; when we love that most in them, in which they most resemble their Master. It may be supposed, that the grace of God will have such an effect upon the hearts of those under its influence, as to soften any asperities of character that may have before existed, and to deepen any amiable traits by which the natural disposition was marked. And it follows from hence that there may be those among the true disciples of the cross of Christ, who are beloved because of some natural amiability or excellence by many who yet pity their delusion in giving up the world for Christ's sake, and are full of enmity against the humbling doctrines of the cross of Christ, by which they are led. But, beloved, the benevolence, which, the Lord has said, shall not lose its reward, is that, not merely which gives a cup of cold water to a disciple, but that which gives it to him, *because he belongs to Christ*.* And so, the love of the brethren, which is an evidence of having passed from death unto life, is a love which is felt for them, not in spite of, but because of, their belonging to Christ. If I love a Christian, because he loves Christ; if I love that best in him, in which he is most like Christ; if I love

* Mark ix. 41.

him more, the more he loves the Saviour ; then I have some evidence that I love Christ Himself. But if, while loving a Christian, because of some amiability I perceive in him, I yet dislike the Christian principles he professes, and cry out against the fanaticism of his Christian conduct, and feel no sympathy with him in his Christian joys, then my love for him is but a flimsy cover for the enmity which yet fills my heart against the cross of Christ. If I have taken up my cross to follow Jesus, then shall I have sympathy and fellowship and love for him who follows the Lord too. And by this I may have some proof that I love Him whom I have not seen, when for His sake I love one that loves Him too, and when our fellowship is such as I can have good ground for hoping shall be perpetuated in eternal glory.

And now, beloved friends and brethren in the Lord Jesus, let me press these truths upon your attention, and endeavor to apply them to your hearts.

Are there not those among you, my fellow-sinners, who do not even profess to believe that ye have passed from death unto life ; who know not what it is to have found peace with God through the blood of His Son, nor have experienced the power of His Spirit, renewing you after the image of Christ ? Alas ! that there

should be too many such careless ones in every congregation, who, though they attend, perhaps, upon the outward ordinances of God, yet never seem to enquire whether they have experienced the inward grace in the conversion of their hearts to God! Dearly beloved, let me remind you of the solemn alternative with which I commenced this address to you, and ask you, Are ye prepared for the awful issue, which awaits the careless world in the judgment of the great day? Have ye, through faith in Jesus, "passed from death unto life?" O! how else shall ye escape the death that never dies? Beloved, by the value of your undying souls, by the terrors of an eternity of woe,—nay, by His love in bearing your sins for you, and by the joys and glories of eternal life, the blessed Jesus calls you to "awake, and arise from the dead!" O! beloved, rest not satisfied in the dangers of your condition; cry not, "Peace, peace" to your souls, "when there is no peace;"* but go to Jesus; seek pardon and peace through His blood; yea, come through Him, and "be reconciled unto God!"

Beloved, ye who profess to have passed from death unto life, and to have had the love of Christ shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit, can your profession abide the test which

* Jer. vi. 14.

the words of the text propose? Does the love of Christ show itself in the love of all for whom Christ died? Do ye show that ye have been begotten again of God, by loving every one who gives evidence of being a new creature in Christ Jesus? Does your heart warm towards every one, in whom ye can recognise the marks of a disciple of the Lord, and your affections embrace all that love the Lord Jesus Christ? O! what a different aspect would the Christian world present, if all who profess to be disciples of Christ could appeal, in proof, to the love they bear to one another. Once it was so, that even a Heathen was compelled to exclaim, "See how these Christians love one another!" Shall it never be so again, until the world and the lust thereof shall have passed away? O yes, beloved, whatever may be the hatreds and divisions among those that merely bear the name of Christ, assuredly the heart, that is truly alive to the love of God, does warm with love for every one that bears the cross of Christ. Judge ye then, beloved, by this test, whether ye have "passed from death unto life," or no?

And does not this subject suggest also to all, who profess to have the witness of the Spirit that they are the children of God, the importance of not only enjoying the privileges, but of manifesting the spirit also of the Master whom

they love? Beloved, if ye are the brethren of Christ, then is the love borne to you for Christ's sake a sign, whether others have passed from death unto life. But this love will be no test unless ye manifest the temper, the spirit, the mind that was in Christ. O! how important, then, is it, that ye should manifest in all your conduct the principles upon which ye act, the end ye have in view; and that, by the consistency of your conversation ye should commend the cross of Christ to a careless and ungodly world. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works; and glorify the Father"* who hath begotten you again, the Saviour who hath redeemed you, the Spirit who hath sanctified you; and that the love they bear to you may be, above all things, upon this ground, "Because ye belong to Christ."

* Matt. v. 16.

SERMON XIII.

SOWING, GROWING, MOWING TIME.

ST. MARK IV. 29.

*But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately
He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is
come.*

AMONG the various similitudes, by which our Lord has illustrated the nature of the kingdom of God, as exhibited in the present dispensation of grace, there are none which strike us as more appropriate or more forcible than those, in which He likens it to some of the various processes of husbandry. There seems to be so natural and so exact a resemblance between the cultivation of the soil and the culture of the heart, between the operations of nature upon the seed sown in the ground, and the operations of grace upon the word implanted in the heart, that we can scarcely even describe the features

of the kingdom of grace in the soul without the use of terms drawn from the corresponding portions of the husbandman's toil.

There is at least no part of the kingdom of nature, from which the Saviour has drawn more frequent or more beautiful illustrations of the work of grace, than this of the culture of the soil. On several occasions, and for the explanation of different aspects of His kingdom, has He referred to the sowing of seed in the earth; and in each we find scarcely anything left to explain with regard to the spiritual process whose nature He would thus portray. At one time, in the sower sowing his seed, we have a general view of the varied reception which the word of truth meets with at the hands of sinful man.* At another, under the similitude of the wheat and tares growing up in the same field together,† we have a picture of the present imperfect state of the visible Church of Christ, and our attention is drawn onward to that solemn time, when the great separation will be made, and the line of eternal severance be drawn between those that only bore the name of Christ and those that had imbibed His Spirit. And at another, we trace, in the gradual progress of the good seed towards maturity,‡ an exposition of the true work of grace in the

* Matt. xiii. 3—8.

† Ib. 24—30.

‡ Ib. 31, 32.

genuine members of Christ's body, the living branches of the True Vine, from the first imperceptible influence upon the yet carnal heart, to the complete transformation of the whole man into the image of Christ, and his meetness, through the work of the Spirit of Jesus within him, for the enjoyment of His presence in His glory.

It is of a parable of this latter description that the text forms a part;—a parable in which our Lord is describing, not the various receptions which the Word of God meets with in the world, but the progress which the good seed, when received into a prepared soil, makes towards maturity. Little as He has left requiring one word of explanation even to the simplest mind, He has yet embodied in this parable some of the deepest and most important experimental truths concerning the soul's progress from its state of corruption and darkness to its state of purity and glory. Upon these it may be profitable for the wisest as well as the simplest to meditate, remembering that "the wisdom of the wise is foolishness with God," but that the very "foolishness of God is wiser than man."* And do thou, O blessed Spirit of the Most High God, vouchsafe to make this meditation profitable to us, and by thy presence

* 1 Cor. i. 25.

and by thy teaching, bless our employment to the edification of our souls, and the glory of the name of Jesus. Take, O! take of the things of Christ and show them to our souls; that the ignorant among us may be enlightened, the slumbering awakened, the self-righteous convinced, the believing strengthened, and all saved!

The parable, of which the text forms a part, suggests to our notice THREE IMPORTANT ERAS in the history of the kingdom of God, and in the history of each soul that is truly brought out of the darkness and corruption of nature into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The first is SOWING TIME, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;" the second is GROWING TIME, "And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear;" and the third is MOWING TIME, "When the fruit is ripe, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." Upon each of these periods let us meditate a little: and may the Lord the Spirit guide, solemnize, sanctify, and bless us!

I. And the first period to which the parable calls our attention, is SOWING TIME: "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed

into the ground." By the sowing time, however, is meant in this parable, not so much the season at which the sower shall scatter his seed, as that at which the soil, being duly prepared, receives the seed. It is, in short, not the history of the ministry of the Gospel, that the parable sets forth, but the history of the soul to which the Gospel is ministered.

And, *What is the seed time of the soul?* It is as clear from this parable, as from other passages of Scripture, what it is not. It is not a season of mere external privilege; it is not invariably connected with the administration of external sacraments; it is not the period of the outward washing in the waters of baptism; it is not the hour of outward and visible communion with the Church of Christ. At such times as this, the soul is brought indeed into visible connexion with the body of Christ upon earth. At such times it receives a palpable seal of the faithfulness of God's covenant engagements; a pledge, that "faith," if already possessed, "is," or, whenever possessed, shall be, "imputed to it for righteousness." It receives the sign of regeneration, the symbol of the new birth, the seal of all the privileges which belong to God's children. But can any one venture to believe, that all who are baptized are truly born again of the Spirit of God,

and made the living spiritual members of God's family, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" of His glory? "That which is born of the Spirit," saith the Saviour, "is Spirit;"* and, although it were rash, indeed, to deny that the fullest influences of the Spirit may, and in some cases do, accompany the baptism with water, can we look upon the earthly, sensual, carnal, worldly lives of too, too many who have been partakers of the outward ordinance, and believe that these are the true children of the Spirit of the Living God? Yet the Scriptures leave us not to such inferences alone. They tell us distinctly what the seed is. "The seed," saith our Lord, "is the Word of God."† "Of His own will begat He us," saith St. James, "by the Word of truth."‡ "Being born again," saith St. Peter, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."§ "As many as received Him," (that is, the Word incarnate,) saith the Evangelist, "to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."||

What then is the seed time of the soul? It is one purpose of the parable to teach us, that *the time cannot be precisely defined*. Even in the

* John iii. 6.

† Luke viii. 11.

‡ James i. 18.

§ 1 Pet. i. 23.

|| John i. 12.

kingdom of nature, whose operations are comparatively open to the view, we cannot define the particular seeds that shall spring up, we cannot tell the precise moment at which the seed, that has been cast into the ground, shall send up its tiny shoot, and spring up, and grow. We cannot control, we cannot even define, the precise amount of the various influences of sun and air, of moisture or of drought, in quickening or delaying the sprouting of the buried seed. And how much less, in looking around upon a congregation of immortal souls, can we say, 'Here is a heart, in which the Word of God is beginning to take root;' 'Here is a conscience, in which the Spirit of God is beginning to awaken some alarms;' 'Here is a soul, in which some long buried lesson of Divine truth, some long past warning, or some recent providence, some Sabbath-school instruction, some Christian mother's teaching, or some Christian minister's appeal, is beginning to take effect, preparing to strike its roots, about to send up its springing blade.' O! how well is it for us that we cannot! Who could persevere in hoping against hope, if he were enabled to perceive what seed would take effect, what seed would be as if scattered to the winds? What Sabbath-school teacher could persevere against the thousand discouragements of the work, if he could see in

how many cases his toil would be in vain? What Christian minister would not hang down his head, and let his hands fall down amid his work, if he could know in how many cases his preaching would be ineffectual? Yea, even what Christian mother's love would have strength to persevere in the fruitless task of training up her children for the Lord, could she perceive that it would be fruitless, and her efforts vain?

What then is the seed time of the soul? Paul may plant, Apollos water; but "God giveth the increase."* Whatever may be the instruments employed; whoever may be the fellow-laborers with God; whatever may be the striking providence, that has arrested the sinner's step; whatever the "still small voice," that has whispered to his soul; the work of grace in the soul is "God's husbandry;" and *the time which He sees best*, the hour which He appoints, the moment approved in His good pleasure, is the soul's seed time. "The preparation of the heart" to receive the seed; the selection of the seed that shall take effect; the arrangement of the hour at which it shall burst forth—all, all is of Him, "whose word shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto He sent it."† To us the seed may

* 1 Cor. iii. 6.

† Isa. lv. 11.

seem to be cast, as it were, "upon the waters;" enough for us the promise, that we shall "find it after many days."* It is ours, then, "in the morning to sow the seed, and in the evening to withhold not our hand; for we know not whether shall prosper:"† but it remains with Him, whose name is Love, whose character Wisdom, whose dispensations Grace.

II. The next period in the soul's history, to which this parable calls our attention, is GROWING TIME. "The seed shall spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

In tracing the resemblance between the growth of corn in the field, and the work of grace in the soul, we remark, that they are,

1. *Alike inexplicable.* The seed "springeth up, he knoweth not how." The argument has been often used to those, who refuse to believe what they cannot understand, that in such case they must deny the evidences of their senses concerning things around them, yea, they must deny their own existence. Where is the philosopher that can explain the principle of life, that can even define precisely what it is? Where is he, that can explain how it is, that

* Eccl. xi. 1.

† Ibid. 6.

the seed, which has been cast into the ground, and turned to corruption, begins ere long to germinate, and sends up the tender shoot, that in the process of time grows into the heavy laden ear of corn? It was not an unnatural difficulty, therefore, which suggested itself to the mind of Nicodemus in his interview with the Saviour, "How can a man be born again?" "How can these things be?" Even our Lord Himself illustrated, but did not explain it. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit."* We can trace the evidence of the new principle, by which, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;"† we can even define the mode of its operation, and show how, being seated in the affections, it influences the life: but the nature of the principle itself, what it is within us that is changed, we can no more explain, than we can analyze the structure of the wind, or make plain to mortal eyes the inward principle of life.

2. The growth of corn in the earth, and that of grace in the soul, are *alike spontaneous*. "The earth bringeth forth fruit of itself." And so grace springeth up in the soul of itself. By this we of course mean, not that grace grows

* John iii. 4, 8, 9.

† 2 Cor. v. 17.

naturally in the corrupt nature of man, any more than corn grows naturally in the untiled ground. But there is something in the soil, which fits it for the growth of the corn. It is not the summer's sun, nor the genial shower, which contains the principle of life. For these may have fallen upon the barren sand, and given it no fruitfulness. It is not alone the husbandman's toil, which makes the earth productive. For if the same labor were expended upon the hard rock, it would continue as fruitless as ever. And so it is in the heart of the sinner himself, that the work of grace must commence and be carried on. It is not the application of the varied means of grace that can effect the change: for, alas! many use all these, and use them all in vain. It is not the reading of the Bible; it is not the ministry of the preached Word; it is not the participation of sacraments, that can make grace effectual. These, under God's blessing, minister, as do the genial influences of the sun and sky to the growth of the corn; but the principle of Divine grace, like the Holy Spirit by whom it is imparted, worketh where it listeth, and how it will.

3. There is a third resemblance, in that they are *alike gradual*. "First the blade; then the ear; after that the full corn in the ear." How small, how almost imperceptible, are often the

beginnings of grace in the soul. There are cases indeed, in which the revulsion of feeling, the change of sentiment, the conversion of the heart seems so sudden, so entire, that the difference, far from being imperceptible, is seen of all men; by some with scoffs of ridicule or distrust, by some with praise and thanksgivings unto God. These, however, are rather the exceptions, than the rule of God's dealings with the soul. In the ordinary way, the soul has gone on, perhaps, in heedlessness and indifference: perhaps been marked by amiability and gentleness: perhaps been diligent in the outward duties of a religious life. But, in the Lord's good time, some voice of Providence or grace arrests the ear;—the soul is startled by the thought: All is not right with me; there is a work of grace, that I know nothing of; I see the Word of God describe, I hear the people of God speak of, a life of God within, a peace with God, a love of God, a joy in God, to which I am a stranger:—there is a desire awakened in the soul to live for better things, a longing after a sense of God's favor and His love, an aspiration towards God and Christ and heavenly things, which was never known before. Often is this desire feeble; this aspiration scarce breathed into a prayer; but, if it be the work of God, it will go on. Like the shooting blade of corn, it

bends before every breeze, and the heavy shower bespatters it with the earth again ; but, if it be a genuine work of grace, it will again lift itself, and gather nourishment and strength from the very trials that threatened to overwhelm it.

In this stage of grace, it is not easy to distinguish between the genuine and the fictitious work. There are some souls, which seem sharply tried by convictions of sin, and, like Herod, "do many things gladly,"* whose "goodness is yet as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."† But the feeble blade of genuine grace goes on, and ere long advances to the ear of fruitfulness. If the difference between the Christian and the world was at an earlier stage scarce perceptible, the difficulty now no longer lasts. The principle of a changed life is now seen in the conduct and the conversation. He, who "is in Christ, is a new creature ; old things have passed away ; behold, all things have become new."‡ Awakened to perceive the sinfulness of sin, he has learned to hate it ; aroused to the danger of the friendship of the world, he has been enabled to renounce its principles, and forsake its ways ; taught by the Spirit the preciousness of Christ, he has learned to live wholly upon Him ; and, having "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by

* Mark vi. 20.

† Hos. vi. 4.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 17.

the Holy Ghost,"* he has learned to "glorify Him in his body and in his spirit, which are God's."†

Nor is the work stationary here. Having given himself to Christ the believer finds that there are daily temptations to encounter, daily sins to subdue, daily graces to cultivate, daily duties to discharge. In meditation upon the unchanging love of God, and in converse with his own still rebellious heart, in the persevering conflict against the enemies of his soul, and in the diligent cultivation of all the means of grace, he goes on advancing in humility, in spirituality, in heavenly-mindedness, in the "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God."‡ So long as he is in the world, he has still some enemy to encounter, some good to do; for he will be the last to think his own work finished, the last to consider his fruitfulness complete, even when he appears to others fit to be gathered as a full ear into the granary of heaven.

III. The concluding period of the soul's history is that to which the text refers, MOWING TIME, OR THE TIME OF HARVEST. "For when the fruit is brought forth," or, as the margin has it, "when the fruit is ripe, immediately He puts in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

* Rom. v. 5.

† 1 Cor. vi. 20.

‡ Phil. i. 11.

This portion of the parable may suggest to us an important hint concerning the removal of Christian friends, which does not seem generally regarded. It teaches us, that the Lord is influenced, in the time of His removing any of His people from this scene of trial, by what He perceives to be their ripeness for His glory. So soon as ever the fruit is ripe, immediately He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. To every soul, that is called out of the darkness of corruption into the family of God, there is an appointed work, and an appointed time; and so soon as the appointed work is completed, then the appointed hour arrives. The Lord could do nothing to the cities of the plain, until Lot was safe in Zoar.* The Lord can do nothing (with reverence we say it), for the punishment of the world, until He has accomplished the number of His elect. The Lord can do nothing for the removal of a soul from this trial state, until His own process is completed by which the soul is ripened for glory. But so soon as in His judgment it is ripe, He keeps it no longer in the midst of trials, but takes it to His joys. Now is the removal of friends, even of Christian friends, generally regarded in this light? Are we not more apt to regard it as a judgment upon ourselves,

* Gen. xix. 22.

than as the completion of God's work of grace in the soul that He has removed to Himself? True, there is a lesson to the living conveyed by every stroke that numbers any Christian with the dead; would that that lesson were more profitably learnt; but the great reason why believers, of whatever age, are removed from this world is, that the great Husbandman perceives them to be ripe; He has brought them to the end of their appointed task; and He has taken them home to their reward.

What a consolation, then, is thus suggested to the heart of the bereaved mourner in the contemplation of *their* state, who are gathered, as the "shock of corn cometh in his season,"* to the garner of the Lord. What friend, that has consigned a Christian relative or friend to the cold ground; nay rather,—for from this idea the mind revolts,—what friend, that has watched the departure of some Christian relative to the glories of his home, can entertain one murmuring thought, or indulge one selfish wish to have the loved spirit back again amid the trials and the woes of earth? We may have seen one as the blooming flower bending in the first glow of loveliness beneath the stroke of decay; we may have seen, as it were, the sturdy oak cut down in the full vigor of its prime; or the

* Job v. 26.

bending ear of corn tottering by its own weight into the grave ; and, as we know that ripeness of grace does not depend upon maturity of nature, we may trust, that, in one or in the other case, they were gathered in their ripeness into the garner of the Lord. And, O ! if we can have this hope, this glorious hope, for them, who would not rather praise the Lord, that there are such things in store for His people, than selfishly repine, because one, however dear to his heart, has been gathered to such joys ?

Dear friends and brethren, beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose hearts the Spirit of God bears witness that ye are the children of God, it is to such a portion as this ye are to look forward, it is to ripen you into meetness for His glory, that all the mercies and the blessings, the trials and the toils, of your present pilgrimage are sent you. The corn-field would not thrive under the continual glare of sunshine ; the alternation of the heavy shower and the cloudy sky is needful for its healthy growth. It were not good for your souls to be basking in this continual glow of prosperity ; it is needful for you that the hour of trial or distress should sometimes arise upon you. Yet what is the trial that ye would not rather welcome than repine at, did ye realize continually that it is a part of the Lord's process for increasing your fruitfulness,

and maturing your soul for blessedness? "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."* Whatever then may be the process by which the Lord is ripening your souls, look forward to the end, when the sickle shall have gathered the ripe ears into the harvest; and the "righteous shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father." †

Yet, dear friends and fellow-sinners, there is an awful thought arising from the contemplation of this parable, and which is more fully carried out in the parallel parable in St. Matthew's Gospel, ‡ that, at the same time that the souls of the Lord's children are ripening for glory, the souls also of the careless, the worldly, the ungodly are ripening for their ruin. It is not alone of the abandoned, the dissolute, the profligate, that this is true; but equally so of the amiable, the generous, the refined, who yet belong to this unconverted world. For, assuredly, there shall be at the last day but the two great divisions of those that have served God, and those that have served Him not; and all, that have not been born again of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, are still among the enemies of God, the children of the Wicked One. Even

* James i. 12.

† Matt. xiii. 43.

‡ Matt. xiii.

the professing Church of Christ contains tares mingled with the wheat ; and, sad to think, the same providences, and the same means of grace, the same trials and the same blessings, which are ripening the one for glory, are maturing the other for destruction. O ! beloved friends, what an awful thought is this even in the abstract ; how still more awful, that there may be some among you thus ripening for ruin ! Mercies surround you, but they do not soften you ; warnings appeal to you, but they do not awaken you ; the Bible addresses you, but ye heed not its voice ; the ministers of God entreat you, but their words seem to you as idle tales, and ye believe them not. How long, beloved, O ! how long shall this be ? Remember that ye have no promise how long ye shall be permitted to go on, no measured scale, by which ye can so calculate your steps as to retrace your ways in time. He knows alone how many calls shall summon you, how many invitations press you, how many mercies plead with you in vain, before the command is given, "Cut it down." O ! trifle no longer, beloved, on the brink of such danger as this ; lest the charge go forth, "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe," and the reapers gather you, with all things that offend, into bundles to be burned.

O ! may the Lord rather dispose your hearts

to cast in your lot with the people of the Lord,
that ye may be bound up with them in the
bundle of life, and with them flourish in eternal
fruitfulness and glory in the garden of the Lord's
delight!

SERMON XIV.

THEY SPAKE OFTEN ONE TO ANOTHER.

MALACHI III. 16, 17.

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.

“FROM the top of the rocks I see him,” exclaims the prophet, whom Balak the King of Moab had sent for to curse the multitudes of Israel, that were approaching his territory after their exodus from Egypt, “and from the hills I behold him: lo! the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”* The Lord had chosen Israel to be a separate people to Himself,

* Num. xxiii. 9.

and had declared, that, for the accomplishment of His own gracious purposes toward them, they should always be distinct from every other nation of the earth.

And in how wonderful a way has this purpose of the Lord been carried out. At this day, when they are scattered over the face of the whole earth, just as much as in the day when they were planted first in the land of Canaan, they are a distinct and a separate people. There is in the very features of their countenances, wherever they may be dispersed, a *family likeness*, which enables any one, at all acquainted with the peculiarity, to decide, wherever he encounters one, Here is a descendant of Israel.

Typical as were in many respects, the descendants of Jacob according to the flesh, of that family which is the true Israel of God, the children of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus,* they are so in this, no less than in other peculiarities. The children of God are called upon to be "a peculiar people;"† and when the world cry out against their "*peculiar*" views and feelings, they are bearing an unwitting testimony, that these are the people whom the Lord hath called. They are called upon to "come out, and be separate"‡ from the customs

* Gal. iii. 7.

† 1 Pet. ii. 9.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 17.

and habits, the vanities and follies of the world, to "take up their cross daily, and follow Jesus."* And throughout the whole multitude of those that do so, there runs a strong family likeness, not less perceptible than if it could be traced in the features of their countenances, not less remarkable than that which severs the Jew from all his fellow-men. Scattered as are the members of the family of God over every portion of the world, there is yet a *family likeness* pervading them, which speedily brings them under the world's eye as persons that are over-much righteous, which speedily unites them one to another, and brings them together, as members of one family, in their mutual trials, perplexities, and cares.

It is to one feature of this peculiarity that the prophet draws our attention in the text. He speaks of "them that fear the Lord;" he describes them as persons, "that speak often one to another" on the subject of their mutual interests and their common hopes; he bears witness, by the power of the Spirit, to the approbation with which the Lord regards them now; he proclaims, in the Lord's name, the promise of His love concerning them in the day when He shall come in his glory.

I would hope for God's blessing, beloved, upon

* Luke ix. 23.

the endeavor to draw your attention to this subject. I would beseech Him to apply, as a searching test, to your hearts, the character given of the Lord's people in the text; I would entreat Him to impress upon you a lively sense of the high privilege, which already belongs to those that fear His Name; I would pray Him so to allure you by the precious promises, which announce the glories of that heavenly scene, to which the Lord Jesus has gone to prepare a place for His people, as to make you willing, with Abraham, to come out from country and kindred, and even your father's house, and set out for that land which the Lord hath told you of.*

Let this, then, beloved, be the division of our subject. Let us consider, first, THE CHARACTER WHICH THE PROPHET GIVES OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE, "They fear the Lord and think upon His Name;" secondly, THEIR PECULIARITY, "They speak often one to another;" thirdly, THEIR PRIVILEGE, "The Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him;" and fourthly, THEIR PROSPECTS, "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." And O! may the Spirit of truth be present to sanctify and

* Gen. xii. 1.

apply our meditations to your present and eternal good !

I. And, in the first place, beloved, THE CHARACTER of the Lord's people is set forth by the prophet in very simple terms ; " They fear the Lord ; they think upon His Name." Some are perhaps ready to exclaim : If this be all that distinguishes the Lord's people, I need not be afraid ; I surely fear God ; I sometimes think upon His Name.

Yet surely there is more in this brief description of the prophet's, than at once strikes upon the ear. *Who are they that think upon the Lord's Name ?* Surely not they are thus described, upon whose minds some transient and unwelcome thought of God intrudes,—upon whose lips His sacred Name is sometimes borne in carelessness, in mockery, in jest,—by whom that blessed Name is even taken in vain by its thoughtless mention, its unmeaning invocation. Surely not they are thus described, who sometimes think upon the Name of God, but rather in terror than in love ; and who turn away from the thought, as irksome and uninteresting, to the more congenial topics of this world and its toys.

Nay, those that the prophet speaks of are they,

who make the Name of God, His goodness and His grace, the theme of their constant and their most pleasing meditations. They are those, who have learned to think upon God as a Father and a Friend, and whose delight it is to meditate upon His love to them in Christ Jesus, and to contemplate that amazing goodness, which has prepared for them such glorious things in His presence and kingdom. They are those, who have learnt to see the hand of God in every dispensation of providence or of grace, and to think upon His Name, as a Name of love, amid all their trials, their troubles, and their cares. They are those, to whom the Word of God is precious, and who make it "their meditation all the day;"* whose eyes "prevent the night watches,"† that they may meditate upon His word. They are those, to whom the thought of God is no intrusive or unwelcome theme; but whose "meditation of Him is sweet,"‡ whose "delight is in the law of the Lord."§

And, surely, there is scarce one thing, which more clearly indicates the state of our affections and our hearts, than the manner in which we think upon God. Some think of Him, as an austere Master, a severe and dreadful God; some think of Him, as so mild and merciful on the

* Ps. cxix. 97.

† Ib. 148.

‡ Ps. civ. 34.

§ Ps. i. 2.



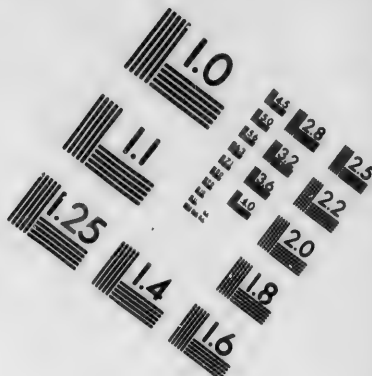
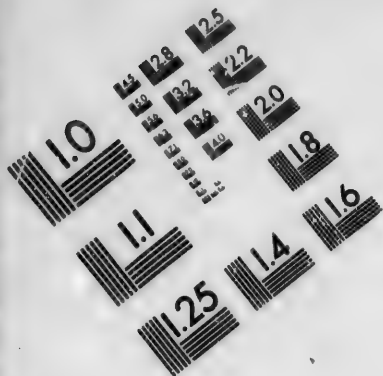
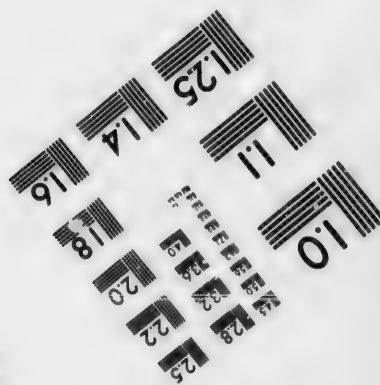
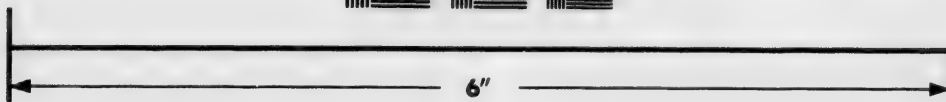
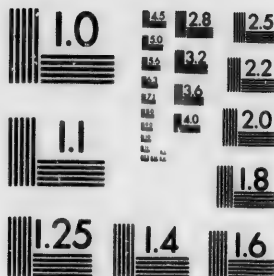


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contrary, that they may trifle with His threatenings, and, without danger, make light of His commands. But *they* only think of Him aright, who contemplate Him, as He is revealed in Christ Jesus, as a God of awful justice, yet unbounded love; and, looking upon Him as reconciled to them by the cross of Christ, think of Him as a Father, love Him as a Friend, and serve Him as their gracious God.

And *who are they that fear the Lord?* Speaketh the prophet in the text of those, who have a slavish dread of God, keeping them indeed from violent outbreaks of iniquity, constraining them by their fears to go through some task-work of religious service; but who have no real love for God, no pleasure in His service, no delight in His ways? O! surely not! The fear of the Lord is often put in the Holy Book for a description of the whole of true religion; and, when so used, is intended to represent to us that childlike reverence, and filial fear, which can only spring from love to God, and from a sense of His mercies in Christ Jesus. The service rendered to the Lord, because of the mere terror of His wrath, is one in which He can find no delight; it is the service of constraint, the obedience of a slave. The service, in which He finds pleasure, is that of the heart; of him, who, touched by the love of Jesus.

yields up his affections to the Lord, and presents his body and his soul "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ."* Now, such love as this casts out the mere slavish fear of God, the mere dread of His wrath, from among the motives by which the soul is influenced; but it deepens and confirms that reverential feeling, which leads the believer to tremble at the very thought of sin, because it offends so kind a Father; to dread the path of wickedness, because it is hateful to so loving, and so good a God.

These then are they, beloved, of whom the prophet speaks, as them "that fear the Lord." They are those whose fear is the fruit of love; who, conscious of the amazing price at which the Lord hath redeemed them, and constrained by His mercies in Christ Jesus to give up their hearts to Him, "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long,"† fearing, as would a loving child, to disobey so kind a Parent's wishes—trembling, as would an affectionate son, lest he should even seem to come short of what so kind a Father has enjoined. Beloved, let me ask, Do ye thus fear the Lord? Do ye thus think upon His Name?

II. The prophet remarks concerning those who thus fear the Lord, as we would, in the

* Rom. xii.

† Prov. xxiii. 17.

second place, observe, that "they speak often one to another."

1. In considering this PECULIARITY, let us perceive, first, that *the fear of the Lord*, of which we here speak, far from being unfriendly to, rather *encourages social intercourse among those that think upon His Name*. It is not unfrequently an objection urged against the call, which is made in the Name of the Lord, to "come out and be separate" from the world, that, though man is a social creature, such a call requires him to make a recluse of himself, to give up society, and to mope in solitude and gloom. And yet, on the other hand, inconsistently enough, it is not unfrequently a taunt in the world's mouth, that, while they, who profess to have come out from the world, condemn the world's follies, they seem to have quite as much enjoyment of themselves in their own way, and to be as happy among themselves, as are the gayest of the world. The latter taunt, unreasonable as it is, has far more ground on which to rest, than the other objection. Surely it may be asked, Is nothing worthy to be called "society" but those assemblages in which the world's vanity reigns supreme, and from which the thought of God is carefully shut out? And is it not, on the other hand, peculiarly the privilege of him, "who fears the Lord and thinks upon

His Name," to be cheerful and happy? Who has such grounds for cheerfulness, as he who has heard the voice of the blessed Jesus saying to him, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee?"* Who has such reason to be happy, as he, who has God for his Father, Christ for his friend, and heaven for his home?

2. Yet, be the objections of the world what they may, assuredly it is the privilege of those, "who fear the Lord and think upon His Name," to meet together in the enjoyment of social intercourse, and to "speak often one to another." But we remark, secondly, that the charm of this privilege, as the prophet speaks of it, is, that *the topics of their intercourse are those of mutual interest to their souls' well being*, the theme of their conversation such as the Lord Himself would join in were He now walking amid the cares of earth. Religion is not, with him whose heart is in it, a mere article of Sunday's dress, to be laid aside whenever the services of the Lord's house are over, to be worn only at stated ceremonies and on set occasions. It is the daily habit, the dress that sits most comfortably upon him, for which he gladly puts off the stiff uniform that the world imposes, and in which his hours of comfort and of happiness are passed. And, if the heart be in it, if the heart be full of

* Mark ix. 2.

love for God, full of hope in Christ, full of joy in the Holy Ghost, surely out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak.* It may be indeed, that, in the presence of those, who have no sympathy with his feelings, no fellowship with his joy, and who cannot even understand his views, the lips of one, whose heart yet overflows with love to their souls, may be sealed up; but surely, when *they* meet together, who have found a common interest in Jesus, and have built their common hopes upon the promises of His love, they will delight to speak to one another upon the things that concern their peace.

III. What the nature of Christians' intercourse with one another is, or ought to be, what the theme of their conversation, what the topics on which they delight to dwell, we may perceive from considering, in the third place, the prophet's description of THE MANNER IN WHICH THE LORD REGARDS IT. "The Lord hearkened," he says, "and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His Name."

Let us conceive the Lord Jesus to be walking, as once He walked, amid earthly scenes, and to be visiting, as once He visited, a family that

* Matt. xii. 34.

professed to love Him, and to think upon His Name. Suppose Him to be but a listener, to be sitting by in silence while the members of the family, with some friends and neighbors, were conversing freely together in the enjoyment of social intercourse. What, might we well suppose, would be the character of their conversation, while they were conscious that the blessed Jesus was listening to their converse; what topics would chiefly be discussed; what themes would be uppermost upon their tongues? Is it not a great fault even among the liveliest believers, that they do not sufficiently realize the presence of the Lord in the midst of them? Is not the Lord Jesus present, not only in the house of prayer, but in the social circle, just as much as though He sat in bodily form among us; does not He hear our conversation; is there an idle word escapes His ear? What, then, may we well suppose, would be the character of that conversation, which, when the Lord Jesus hears, He thinks worthy of remembering, and for which "a book of remembrance" is written up before Him?

It is not difficult to imagine what would be the effect of the presence of the Lord Jesus, should He come suddenly into the midst of a scene of *worldly intercourse and amusement*. When the very mention of His Name would be

considered ill-timed and improper; when the remembrance of His all-seeing eye would cast a shade of gloom over the festive circle; what would the effect be of His coming in all His dignity and purity, and standing in the midst? And must we not ask, not only, Are these professed followers of Christ? but, Are they even reasonable beings, who acknowledge the truth that God's eye is upon them, who admit that they know they are placed here to be made ready for eternity, who know that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account in the day of judgment;"* but whose only idea of recreation appears to be that of banishing all thought and care; whose only scheme of happiness seems to be that of keeping God out of the thoughts, and chasing away death and judgment and eternity, till they can be put off no longer?

And should it be more difficult to conceive, what would be the effect of the presence of Jesus in the midst of *a circle, composed of those whose hearts are warmed with love to Him, and filled with the hope of His glory?* Would not His coming draw forth from grateful hearts the expression of their thankfulness and joy? Would they not delight to recount to His praise the many mercies of the way, by which His

* Matt. xii. 36.

grace had led them on? Would they not delight to dwell upon the tidings of His love to others, and praise the glory of that grace, which here and there awakens sinners from their sins and draws them to His cross? Would it not be their joy to speak one to another of their mutual trials and their mutual joys, to compare their respective progress in the way to Zion, to derive from each other's experience some counsels for the road, to quicken and to stir each other up to increasing diligence, and devotedness, and love? Surely, these are things which the Lord would be pleased to hear; things, which, if recorded in the book of His remembrance, we might hope to look back upon as memorials of God's love to us, and of the trials of the way by which He led us to His glory.

IV. It is with a view yet more clearly to perceive what should be the nature of Christians' intercourse with one another, that we proceed to consider, in the fourth place, THE PROSPECTS HELD OUT FOR THE FUTURE to those that fear the Lord, and think upon His name. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."

Here is a glorious prospect, indeed, set before those that fear the Lord! In the world they

may have tribulation; in the world they may be poor, despised, and cast out; in the world they may be made a sport, a bye-word, and a jest; but they are reserved among the Lord's treasures, and shall be acknowledged as His precious ones, and set as jewels in His crown, in the day when "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."* "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord."† "Such honor have all His saints."‡

And, looking on beyond the day, when the Lord shall claim them as His own, we see them admitted "to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant."§ Admitted to such society as this, what shall be their occupations? They learn the song, which no man knoweth, of Moses and the Lamb: || and "rest not, day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts."¶

Such is the happy scene, and such the chief feature of the happiness, to which they that have feared the Lord and thought upon His

* 2 Thess. i. 10.

† Isa. liv. 17.

‡ Ps. cxlix. 9.

§ Heb. xii. 22—24.

|| Rev. xv. 3.

¶ Isa. vi. 3.

Name shall be admitted in that day. And here, in the present life, is the time of preparation, the season of growing meetness for that joy. And here, we are assured, do those who are led by the Spirit of God, receive the witness of the Spirit, an earnest and a pledge of the glory that shall be revealed. What then will be the topic of greatest interest to those, who have the witness of the Spirit that they are the children of God, and who are looking forward to the enjoyment of His presence in His kingdom? Can the hope of heaven be a lively hope, and yet the joys of heaven be a subject banished from the conversation, or one, which, if introduced, a cold assent alone will welcome? Can the society of heaven be one, whose occupations we expect to delight in, in whose praises and thanksgivings we hope to bear a part, and yet, can we find no pleasure now in meditating upon its blessedness, and in speaking one to another concerning the nature of its joys?

It is a test^e of no trifling importance, by which we may judge of our souls' condition, whether we have now any such delight in serving God, that it would be to us a joy to be transferred to scenes where they serve Him without ceasing. What, for instance, can we think of *their* fitness to enjoy a perpetual Sabbath in heaven, to whom the religious exercises of the Lord's day on

earth are a weariness and a task? How can we suppose any one fit to enjoy the presence of Jesus for ever in His kingdom, to whom the Word of Christ, His precious volume, is a dull and tedious book? And, beloved, how can we imagine any one, how can we believe ourselves, meet to enjoy the communion of the blest in heaven, if we find no pleasure now in speaking to one another upon the things of God, in conversing upon the love of Jesus, and maintaining fellowship with one another in the Spirit of Christ?

Suffer me then, dearly beloved, to apply this test to you, to those of you who profess to hope for heaven, but yet think it is going entirely too far to expect you to be always preparing for heaven. Beloved, let me ask you, what heaven is? Is it not a scene of happiness, and of holiness, and of praise? Is it not the dwelling-place of God, and of His Son Christ Jesus, and of the glorious angels, and the spirits of the just? And is it not the great charm of this scene of joy, that all who are admitted there are full of love to Jesus, and of delight in His presence; of thankfulness for His redeeming mercy; of praise for His wondrous love? And ye hope to go to heaven. And ye think ye could enjoy such a scene as this. O! what then is the mighty change which ye expect to

be wrought in you, before ye, who now think religion may be overdone, and that a constant musing upon Eternity would well nigh distract you, can be fit to enjoy such a scene as heaven is described to be? If the occupations of heaven could be transferred to earth, ye would think them a weariness and a burden; how can ye carry these feelings to heaven, and not find heaven itself an irksome and a weary scene? Beloved, there must be, indeed, a mighty change wrought in you, before ye can be fit to dwell with God. But it must be wrought in you here, before ye die; for be assured on the word of Jesus, that "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."*

But it may be feared that even among those whose hearts are in the matter, and who have known Christ, or rather been known of Him, as their Saviour, their joy, their hope, there is too frequently a backwardness and hesitation about speaking one to another upon the things which concern their souls. Beloved, why is this? Is it that your faith in Christ is the mere assent of the understanding, and not a deep principle in the heart? Is it that your thankfulness for the mercies of His grace is the mere expression of ceremony, the mere phrase

* Matt. xviii. 3.

of compliment, and not the deep gratitude of the heart? Is it that your hope of heaven is the mere vague hope of the world, and not that "anchor of the soul, which entereth into that within the veil?"* I trust that the fault does not lie so deep as this. And yet, beloved, if the heart be full of love to Jesus, of gratitude for His mercy, of praise for His great salvation, will not the abundance of the heart overflow in the language of the lips? And if the soul be really looking out for Christ, expecting His presence, and anticipating an abundant entrance to His kingdom, will it not find it hard to refrain from speaking of its hopes? Let me then entreat you, beloved, to cherish a more realizing sense of the preciousness of Christ, and of your own interest in His love. Aim more at living upon Christ by faith, seek more to enjoy His presence by communion with Him in prayer. Strive more after conformity to His image, more after resemblance to His likeness. Pray, too, that ye may more have His love shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit. For, if your own souls are in a lively state of communion with God, as a reconciled Father in Christ; then will ye be constrained, like the Psalmist, to call upon those "that fear God," to hear "what God hath done for your souls."†

* Heb. vi. 19.

† Ps. lxvi. 16.

Dearly beloved, we all need to be much stirred up in this matter. While they, who have their portion in this life, are full of the pleasures, and business, and conversation of the world, let it be the care of those that fear the Lord to think and speak much upon His name. "For they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

SERMON XV.

SPEECHLESS.

ST. MATTHEW XXII. 12.

And he was speechless.

“THE law was given by Moses: but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”*

The parable of which the text forms a part, gives us a view of the preparatory nature of the law. It was not a system “which could have given life;” it was not itself “good tidings of great joy;” it was on the contrary a heavy yoke, which they to whom it was given were not able to bear.† Yet was it designed as a messenger to proclaim the sinner’s need of Christ, and to point the way to Him; it was sent forth by the Lord as a servant to announce the coming marriage of His Son, and to call those that were bidden to the wedding; it was a “schoolmaster,

* John i. 17.

† Acts xv. 10.

to bring unto Christ." * But its teachings were unheeded ; its invitations were neglected : its message was in vain. And then, the gracious tidings of salvation by Christ Jesus, " the grace and truth " that were in Him, were proclaimed far and wide, and offered to all the outcasts of the Gentile world ; and they who were ignorant of the law, " and strangers from the covenants of promise," the " aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," † were urged to come, " without money and without price," and to " sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven." ‡

These gracious tidings of salvation by Christ Jesus have been proclaimed, beloved, unto you ; and ye, who had no part nor lot in the covenant made with Abraham and his sons, have been invited to come and partake freely of the fulness that is in Christ Jesus. " Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," is the gracious invitation : " and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." § " The Spirit and the Bride say, Come ! and let him that heareth say, Come ! and let him that is athirst, come ; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." ||

And, indeed, from the very first, there seem to

* Gal. iii. 24. † Eph. ii. 12. ‡ Matt. viii. 11.

§ Isa. lv. 1. || Rev. xxii. 17.

have been those, who were willing enough to accept the "grace" that is in Christ Jesus, but to overlook His "truth." There have ever been those, who are willing to receive the mercy of the Lord, if they might have it on their own terms; but who like not the demand of the conversion of heart, the spirituality of soul, the holiness of life, which is made of all those that would be saved of the Lord's mercy at the last. They boast themselves in the name of Christians; they pride themselves in the privileges of Christians; they hope for the Christian's home hereafter; but they like not, as a test of their being in Christ, the examination whether they be "new creatures," "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that they should walk in them."*

And to draw our attention to such a case as this, is the chief scope and aim of the parable before us. The early portion of the story reminds us of the unbelief and hardness of heart, with which the Jews, the long-favored people of God, turned away from the invitations of the Lord's grace, made to them in His Son Christ Jesus. It proceeds to contrast with their obduracy, the glad welcome which the Gentiles gave to the message of salvation, and the readiness with which the multitudes of the heathen world flocked to the

* Eph. ii. 10.

uplifted standard of the cross of Christ. But the emphasis of the parable is laid upon the entrance of the King, in whose name the invitations had been given, to see the multitude of guests, that were assembled to partake of His hospitalities. There was a multitude, indeed, gathered there. The servants, who had been sent forth, had invited all, whatever their condition, whatever their dress, to come. But it was a provision of the feast, that every one who entered should put on a robe provided for him at the cost of the Master of the feast, that all who were gathered round the board might be clad in the same spotless dress to do honor to the King. Whatever differences there might have been in their apparel when the invitation reached them; though some were hung with the tatters of abject poverty, some were dressed sufficiently well to meet the world's eye, some were bespattered with the filth of the highway, and some, however poor their clothing, yet manifested the utmost neatness in its adjustment, — all distinction must be laid aside on entering the doors, within which the wedding-feast was to be held. A robe of purest white was provided for each one that came, and as freely furnished as the invitation had been freely given. Yet, when the King came in, his eye was caught at once by one among the guests, who

had come in in the dress he wore when the invitation reached him, and whose appearance was not in keeping with the harmony and beauty that prevailed throughout the apartment. The sight struck painfully upon the view of the King, who well knew how rich was the provision which had been made; and at once he asks him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?" Didst thou not know the rule of such a feast as this? Was not a garment offered for thine acceptance at the door? But he was speechless. He knew that he had but his own perverseness, his own obstinacy, his own pride to censure with his delinquency; and, loud as he might before have been in his professions of indifference, loudly as he might have boasted, that, if not well dressed enough for such a feast as this, he would not condescend to put on the gift-dress, which was offered to the filthiest beggar just as it was to him, his tongue was silenced now. Gladly would he now have recalled his words. Gladly would he now have accepted the offered robe. Gladly would he now have exchanged his vaunted dress with the meanest and most abject, that had urged him to comply with the terms of the feast. But it was now too late. The hour had arrived for the marriage-feast to begin. Already the distant torches' glare

announced the Bridegroom's coming. Away, then, must he be cast. "Bind him hand and foot," exclaims the King, whose rigor now seems stern in proportion to His former graciousness, "and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The application of this parable, beloved, is sufficiently simple. Yet awfully solemn is the truth, which it is designed to enforce upon every professed member of a Christian Church; and deeply momentous the enquiry which it should excite, on the part of every one who calls himself a Christian, whether he be clad with the marriage garment of the Lamb or not. It would evidently be a perversion of the purpose of the parable, to consider it as supplying any scale of the proportion, which the unbelieving and ungodly shall be found to bear, at last, to the faithful followers of the Lamb. Even among the professed disciples of the lowly Jesus, it may be feared that far more than one shall be found, whose profession was but pretence, and whose robe was hypocrisy or self-righteousness. But, even, if there should be but one; if, when the King comes in to see the guests, there should be even one without the wedding garment; if, at the last great day of account, there should be even one among the professed followers

of Christ, that shall be found unfit to enter into His kingdom ; if there be even one against whom the solemn sentence shall go forth, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness ;" O ! should we not, beloved, each one of us, seriously and solemnly enquire, Have I any grounds for believing that I shall not be that one ?

The consideration of his case, to whom the text calls our attention, is, I trust, well calculated to aid us in the enquiry. May the Spirit of eternal truth be graciously vouchsafed to us, and lead us into the truth ; may he be present to apply His word, so that it may be sharper than any two-edged sword, laying bare to us the secrets of our hearts, convincing us of sin, and leading us for the cleansing and the clothing of our souls to the all-sufficient righteousness of Christ !

In considering the case which is brought before us in the text, and endeavoring to apply it for our own instruction, we are led to notice, in the first place, the information which the parable supplies us of THE STATE OF THIS MAN BEFORE THE COMING OF THE KING TO SEE THE GUESTS : secondly, THE DEFECT IN HIM, which at once struck the eye of the King : and, thirdly, THE REASONS OF HIS INABILITY TO PLEAD ANY EXCUSE in answer to the King's enquiry.

I. 1. And, in the first place, we observe concerning this hapless guest, that he was, *one who had been called from the highways and hedges of an ungodly world*. And like him, we, beloved, have been called from a state of unregeneracy and pollution, and invited to become "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty."* The condition of the most abject wanderer about the streets and lanes of the city, of the merest outcast among the highways and hedges, is not more pitiable, in relation to the comforts of the present life, than is the state in which our nature is left by original pollution and actual sin. Conceived in iniquity and born in sin, we bring into the world with us a blinded understanding, a perverted will, a corrupted heart. Growing up, too frequently, under the unsubdued influence of the carnal mind, we go on at enmity with God; we wander along the broad and beaten path of worldliness and sin; we hide ourselves from God in any shelter, that the streets or hedges of the world supply. But God commendeth His love towards us, in that, when He looked upon us in this abject state, He had pity upon us; He gave His Son to die for us; He sent to us in the name of His dear Son a message of love, saying, Come, and "be ye reconciled to God."† To whom among you,

* 2 Cor. vi. 18, 19.

† Ib. v. 20.

beloved, has not this mercy been commended ; to whom has not this message of His love been sent ?

2. The guest in the parable was, secondly, *one who admitted, by his acceptance of the invitation, that he was one of those for whom it was designed.* And it is the general confession of those who call themselves Christians, that they are by nature sinners, and that they need the mercy of the Lord. There can be none so hardy or so ignorant in the present time, as to deny the corruption of their nature, and to refuse assent to the truth, that they have by practice "left undone the things which they ought to have done, and done the things that they ought not to have done," so that, in short, "there is no health in them." Yet O ! who could have believed, that a confession such as this should be so generally made, and yet produce so little seeming effect upon the conduct of those who make it ? How abject is the condition in which we admit ourselves to be, in confessing that we are sinners ! Sin is the abominable thing which God hates. Sin is the accursed thing, against which His most fearful wrath has been denounced. As sinners we deserve God's wrath. As sinners we are at enmity with God. Who can believe this of himself, and not fly at once to the offered mercy, and accept the free salvation ?

3. The guest in the parable was, thirdly, *one*

who had done this. He had accepted the gracious invitation that was given him : he had come with those that came, and placed himself among the guests that were awaiting the coming of the King. And what member is there of a Christian Church, that does not at least profess to have done this too? Who is there, that by baptism has been admitted within the pale of the visible Church ; who is there, yet more, that comes to partake from time to time of the precious memorials of the Saviour's love, that does not thus profess himself a lost and miserable sinner, that does not thus declare himself a follower of Christ, and avow his trust in Him as his great salvation? Some indeed go beyond this ; some by an earnest acknowledgment of their convictions of sin, and by their avowal of a lively trust in Jesus and desire to follow Him, make a larger profession of religion ; but there is no baptized member of the Church of Christ, that does not, by his very membership with the Church, make acknowledgment of his lost condition, and profess his need of Christ and His salvation.

II. Upon such a profession as this the visible Church of Christ is based ; and, so long as its administration is in human hands, in the hands of those, to whom has not been given the

discerning of the heart, so long must all those be considered members of Christ's Church, who outwardly at least, profess His Name. But there is a day coming, in which more than this will be required ; the time approaches, at which the King Himself shall come in to see the guests ; and " who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth ? " *

His eye at once lighted upon the hapless guest, to whom the text refers, and He addresses to him the searching question, " How camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment ? " Let us consider, in the second place, WHAT IS THE DEFICIENCY which is here referred to ?

It is evident, this figure of the garment represents to us *what constitutes the soul's meetness for the presence and kingdom of God*. We cannot, therefore, limit its meaning to any one point of Christian faith or practice, but must consider it as referring to that which constitutes the very essence of Christianity. This may indeed be expressed by one word, " righteousness," in the double sense in which that word is used in the New Testament ; let us consider, then, what that righteousness is.

1. It is, first, *the imputed righteousness of Christ*. Sinner that man is, he is under the curse of God. And nothing, that man can do,

* Mal. iii. 2.

can deliver him from the curse, or earn for him the pardon of his sins. But, in the rich grace and mercy of the Lord, there is a righteousness provided, which is freely offered to every sinner who deserves the wrath of God. It is not pardon that is offered; for solemnly has the Lord announced, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die!"* and merciful as He is, "He cannot deny Himself," or make void His truth. It is no promise that the Lord will overlook transgression, or allow some sins to escape; for "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;"† He will make no terms with sin. But it is righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, which is offered to the sinner, and which he is invited to put on, as his complete justification in the sight of God. Your sins have called down upon you the curse of God; but He has been made a curse for you, and borne it in your stead. The wrath of God has been denounced against your sins; but "God hath made Him to be sin for you, who knew no sin;"‡ He hath poured out upon Him the punishment of your iniquity. The broken law demands your condemnation; but He has been "obedient even unto death" for you. Sinners then as you are, the Lord offers to clothe you with His righteousness, to assign to you the merit of His obedience unto death, to make over to you, if you will but accept it, the

* Ezek. xviii. 4.

† Hab. i. 13.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 21.

full benefit of His finished work. Beloved, have ye put on this beautiful robe, this garment of salvation? Have ye accepted the gracious offer, which the Lord makes to you sinners, of a righteousness so spotless, so complete as this? Have ye put on Christ by faith? Are ye clothed with Him? O! if not, though ye may be called by the name of Christ, though ye may be numbered among the guests at His sacred feast, when He shall come to take account of His servants, shall He not address to you the awful question, "How camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?"

2. This garment is, secondly, *the imparted righteousness of Christ*. The faith which puts on Christ, is the covering and righteousness of the sinner, is invariably a "faith which worketh by love."* Its fruits are the hearty renunciation of the world and sin, and the earnest following after "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."† For "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."‡ And if the sinner needs the righteousness of Christ to deliver him from the curse and condemnation of his sins; if he requires such a plea as this to screen him from the wrath of God, such a covering to hide him from the vengeance due to sin; surely not less does he require the cleansing

* Gal. v. 6.

† Heb. xii. 14.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 17.

of his soul from worldliness and sin, the conversion of his heart, the sanctification of his spirit, before he can be meet to join the "general assembly and Church of the first-born," and to "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob" in the presence and the kingdom of the pure and holy God. And this is no less the gift of God than the justification of the sinner's soul. Repentance is the gift of God. "A new heart and a right spirit"* are His gift. Holiness is His work alone. "Christ is made of God," unto them that believe, "Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption."† And this gift, beloved, is offered unto you. This garment of holiness, the fruit of "the love of God shed abroad in the heart" is pressed upon your acceptance. Have ye put it on? Have ye been converted and made new creatures in Christ Jesus? Have ye "been created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works?"‡ O! if not, though ye have been numbered among the children, and come with them to seek admission to the Father's table, how will ye answer the momentous question, "How camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?"

III. "And he was speechless." Loudly as might before have talked this unhappy guest, he

* Ezek. xi. 19.

† 1 Cor. i. 30.

‡ Eph. ii. 10.

was only silent now. Many as had been before his reasons for declining the offered robe, he had not one to urge now. His own conscience testified, that he had not one excuse to give, which did not carry with it its own reply. And he hung his head in silent self-condemnation.

And shall it not be so with the sinner, in the day when the Lord bringeth him to judgment; shall it not be so with every one, that professes the hope of heaven, but has not on a wedding garment?

Let us consider, in the third place, SOME OF THE REASONS by which we may suppose him to have been influenced in declining the proffered robe, and see how utterly untenable they will be in the day of the Lord,

1. It may be, that, having been called in from among the highways and hedges, *he thought he ought not to be expected to appear in better than he could bring.* Put into other words, how frequent is this plea in the mouth of the sinner now! I am told, says he, I am a guilty and a helpless sinner, that my nature is corrupt, and I am utterly unable even to think one thing that is good; and yet I am told that I cannot stand before God, unless I am made completely righteous, that I cannot enter into His kingdom, unless I become holy, as He is holy. How inconsistent, how unreasonable is this! But

who shall urge this plea, when he shall stand, face to face, before the Lord? The guest in the parable was silent, because he knew that the garment, in which he was required to appear, was provided for all that came. And will not conscience reply to the sinner at the great day: This might have been unreasonable, had not a full and perfect righteousness been offered, been urged on your acceptance. You were guilty; but Christ was offered as your righteousness. You were helpless; but Christ was offered as your strength. You were polluted; but there was a fountain opened for your cleansing. You were lost; but Jesus came to save. He came into the world to save sinners; He invited the weary and the heavy laden unto Him; and ye would not even come to Him, that ye might have life! Beloved, is this your plea; are there any of you that thus reason now? O! consider how this plea shall stand you in the day of the Lord.

2. Or it may be, that *this guest had been somewhat better dressed than those who were around him*, and, vain of this superiority, had scorned to wear a robe, which he looked upon as in some measure the garb of charity. We can imagine him, while awaiting the coming of the king, looking round upon the other guests, and self-complacently exclaiming: Let those that will, put on this borrowed garb; as for me, if the king is

not satisfied with me as I am, I will wear no other dress! But where is this vaunting, when the eye of the king singles him out from the assembled guests, and the question is asked, "How camest thou in hither?" And there are many souls, to whom the very graciousness of the offer of salvation by Christ Jesus is a stumbling block in the way of their accepting it. Surely, say they, we have done the best we can. We have lived moral lives. We have attended upon the ordinances of the Church. We have been as religious as we could; and must we be told, that all this is good for nothing; that we must renounce it all and put on the righteousness of Christ? Nay, this may do for the profligate and ungodly; it may be well to urge on *them* the necessity of conversion, and to urge them to put on a better righteousness than their own; but surely *we* may plead our sincerity, our morality, our devotion, as sufficient to ensure for us the mercy of the Lord.—Yet will not conscience, at the great day, hush all such suggestions as these, by replying, Whatever your goodness may have been, it was not the Lord's righteousness; and how will you urge your righteousness in the presence of the Holy God, or plead your miserable works before Him, "in whose sight the heavens are not clean?"*

* Job xv. 15.

Beloved, are there any of you, who are now hugging the sad delusion of doing something for your own salvation, as a reason for not accepting the righteousness of Christ? Oh, how will this delusion comfort you in the day of the Lord?

3. Or it may be, that this guest had declined the offered robe *in mere carelessness how he should appear*. He had come because others came; he had entered with the multitude, when the door was set open; but he passed by the offer of the wedding garment without a thought, and cared not how he might appear, until the very question of the king struck terror into his heart. And there are those who are called Christians on no higher ground. They were baptized in their infancy, because their parents brought them to the font. They have grown up in the knowledge of Christian truth, and from their infancy have been accustomed to attend upon the ordinances of Christian worship. But it has concerned them little to enquire, whether they have any real interest in Christ; they have never seriously given it a thought, whether they are new creatures in Christ Jesus, and so have been made meet for the Lord's presence in His glory. And what plea will carelessness such as this suggest, in the day when the Lord shall bring the soul to judgment? Would not the coming of the Lord strike terror into your hearts, ye

careless ones, and leave you without one word of answer to the solemn enquiry He will make ?

4. Or it may be, that this hapless guest was one who knew the terms of the feast, and that none could sit down, but they that should be clad in the marriage garment ; but *there was some part of his former dress that must be put off, and he clung to this remnant of his former self*, trusting that he should have time enough to give it up before the King came in. And it may be feared, that there are many such ; persons who know their sinfulness ; who know they cannot take their sins to heaven ; who know that Christ is the only way, and that they, who would dwell with God, must put on Christ. But the gate is too narrow ; the way too strait. There is still some cherished sin they love too well ; still some worldly propensity, some sinful habit, some unholy desire, on account of which they cannot come with a whole heart to Christ. And they go on, still trusting that the day may come, when they can more conveniently give themselves up to Christ, and at last the voice of the coming Judge surprises them yet halting between the two, knowing well that they ought to give themselves to Christ, yet loving their sin too dearly to give it up for Him. And what shall ye have to urge, beloved, in that solemn day ? What excuse shall your then awakened conscience supply for

your being found without the wedding garment?
O! that you would consider this before it is too late; and fly at once to Christ for cleansing and salvation!

Under one or other of these descriptions, beloved, it may be feared, must the most of you be classed. Are ye setting up your own righteousness, and thus refusing to submit to the righteousness of God; or are ye hugging up your sins, and refusing to give them up, for the sake of heaven and its joys; are ye justifying your worldliness by the plea of the difficulties of godliness; or are ye carelessly leaving your soul's concerns to the peradventure of a dying hour? In either of these cases, beloved, ye are sowing confusion for the hour of trial, and wretchedness and despair for the Eternity that awaits you. O! may the Lord awaken you to the enquiry, how ye shall appear before Him at His coming; and lead you to seek Him and His righteousness, who shall be your peace and joy for ever!

Or, are ye of those, who are numbered among the Lord's people, and profess to be looking out for His appearing, but who yet love some sin too well to give it up for Christ? Ye may go on deceiving yourselves, beloved, and deceiving those around you; but "be not deceived, God is not mocked;"* and how awful will be your state,

* Gal. vi. 7.

when the light of the Lord's coming meets your eye, and the question of His searching judgment strikes upon your ear! "If any man will come after me," saith the Saviour, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* O! that He may give you grace to follow Him with a true heart now, that, in the day when He shall come, He may receive you to His joys!

* Luke ix. 23.

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SERMON XVI.

THEY BEGGED HIM TO DEPART.

MATTHEW VIII. 34.

*And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus:
and when they saw Him, they besought Him that
He would depart out of their coasts.*

“HE came unto His own; and His own received Him not.”* What a contrast between the godlike condescension of the Lord of life, and the corruption and rebellion of sinful man, is presented to us in these words! He, the eternal Son of the eternal God, by whom all things were made, and “for whose glory they are, and were created;”† He left the bosom of His Father, and the glories which He had with Him before the world was, and came down to this earth which He had formed. He came to the creatures of His hand; to those, whom His

* John i. 11.

† Rev. iv. 11.

word had quickened, His power sustained, His providence supplied ; to those, whose minds He had endowed with reason, whose hearts He had warmed with the affections of nature, whose souls He had endued with a capacity of immortality. He came, too, on a mission of love to those who were rebellious ; on an errand of mercy to those who were guilty ; on a message of salvation to those who were lost. And yet, notwithstanding all this, those He came to "received Him not." They "would none of His counsel ;" they rejected the offers of His mercy ; they despised the message of His love.

Surely, it is hard to say which most to wonder at ;—the grace, the tenderness, the love of God in Christ, or the perverseness, the ingratitude, the rebellion of lost and ruined man. Truly, "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Truly, man displays his corruption and alienation from God, in that, when such a Saviour is provided, he "will not" even "come to Him," he will not even receive Him into his heart, that he "might have life!"†

The truth we here refer to is not, however, merely one of those vague generalities, to be treated, as sermons so commonly are,—made to fit every one but ourselves. It is not

* Rom. v. 8.

† John v. 40.

merely one of those broad statements of the truth whose theory may be readily admitted, but of which it is difficult to bring any evidence from facts. The history of the times in which the blessed Jesus lived and walked on earth affords many illustrations of it, before we arrive at that consummation of man's wickedness, the nailing the Lord of glory to the accursed tree; while the knowledge of our own days, and of that which passes continually within us and around us, is sufficient to convince us, that it is still, as it was in days long since; He cometh to His own, and His own receive Him not.

The case which is recorded in the closing verses of the eighth chapter of St. Matthew, affords an instance, painfully in point, of the kind of reception which the Lord Jesus met with at the hands of those whom He came to bless. It may be well for us, with the Lord's blessing, briefly to consider, in the first place, some of the circumstances of this case; and then to endeavor to apply it, as exemplifying the tendency of man's corrupt heart in every age; and the sin and danger of rejecting Christ. May that blessed Spirit, by whose gracious inspiration all Scripture has been written for our learning, vouchsafe His presence, His teaching, and His blessing; that our meditations upon this portion of His holy word may be made

unto us "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."*

Scarcely had our Lord come down from the mount upon which He had delivered so heavenly an exposition of the truth of God, when He became engaged in ministering to the wants and sufferings of His needy creatures. The miracles which He wrought drew around Him a wondering multitude, who gazed with open-mouthed astonishment upon the displays of His power, but cared not to receive the doctrine they were intended to confirm, nor the Saviour whose divine mission they approved. Anxious to escape for a little while from the pressure of this intrusive crowd, the Saviour put off with His disciples to go over the sea of Tiberias, hoping thus to enjoy some precious intercourse with those whom He had chosen. He came into the land of the Gergesenes; where His attention is soon arrested by objects well suited to engage His sympathy, and call forth the exercise of His power. There met Him two, possessed with devils, who had long been a terror to the neighborhood, and a torture to themselves. No kindness could soothe, no force restrain, these miserable beings; but the moment that their eye lights upon Jesus, the evil spirits within them recognise a Master, and are con-

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

strained to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Lord. He bids them give up at once their foul possession of the miserable beings they have so long tormented; but, strange to say, they remonstrate against His command. They beg permission, instead of being peremptorily cast out, to enter into a vast herd of swine, feeding on the mountain side. Jesus complies with their request. "And, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters." The poor demoniacs, relieved of the horrible tenantry that had so long defiled them, come and cast themselves at the feet of Jesus; and there they sit, and listen to His gracious words, and drink in, as the parched land imbibes the grateful shower, the precious doctrine that distils from His lips.

But lo! the tidings of the miracle thus wrought have roused the city, in whose suburbs it has been performed. The keepers of the swine had fled, and told, in terms that doubtless magnified the marvel of their tale, what had happened to the herd of which they were in charge, and what had befallen those, that so long had been the terror of the coast. The whole city then pours out its inhabitants; old and young, they flock towards the tombs, which fright had long preserved in silence and seclusion. And there what a sight meets their view! There sits, amid

the tombs, the meek and lowly Jesus, the Lord of life, surrounded by the mournful epitaphs of death. And at His feet are sitting, clothed, rational, meek, and gentle, the two whose frantic violence had long banished them from the haunts of men, and made their names a sound of dread in children's ears. How touching, how overpowering the sight! Surely, the whole multitude will draw near to listen to the teachings of this wondrous man! Surely, they will join in one glad welcome to their city of a Being who thus speaks the word to evil spirits, and compels them to obey; and will vie with one another in doing honour to Him, of whose mighty deeds they have seen so glorious a proof.

Yet no! some deep mysterious dread of this gentle Being pervades the gathering throng. They mutter dark things one with another; they put one and another forward to make known to Jesus their sullen purpose to resist His coming; and, at last, fearful lest He should misconstrue their approach into an intention to give Him welcome, they break out in one strong exclamation: Depart from us! we would have none of Thee! But O! why, why is this? why thus cast out so meek, so gentle a Being as the lowly Jesus? Why thus reject the Mighty One, at whose feet now sit the trophies of His victory

over the powers of darkness? Why thus refuse admission to their gates, to One whose coming might be the harbinger of health to their diseased, comfort to their distressed, life even to their dead? Ah! surely *conscience* is at work! The message, that announced to them the coming of the gracious Jesus, and told them how His power had been displayed in bringing the demoniacs to His feet, told also, that, by His permission, the evil spirits which had so long haunted them, had gone into the herd of swine, and driven them with frantic violence into the deep. They knew, that by the keeping of the swine, an animal declared unclean by the law of God, they had been violating the Lord's commands; and, when this act of Jesus brought their sin to their remembrance, and struck from their hands the guilty profit they had hoped to gain by their forbidden traffic, they trembled, as Felix did before St. Paul, and cried out to Him, to depart. Alas! they knew not, they cared not to know, that He, whose visit had thus brought home to them their sin, was the only One that could wash out their guilt, and give them peace with God; they saw not, they cared not to see, in the cure of the demoniacs, a proof that He, who thus had shown He could have no fellowship with sin, was meek and merciful and mild, abundantly able to deliver them

from every evil, and as willing as He was able to bless them and to do them good. No! they saw only the strictness and holiness of His character; they saw only that His presence would be fatal to the hopes of their ungodly gain; and loving their sins too well to like the presence of the holy Jesus, they begged, they besought Him to depart. And, alas! He took them at their word. He entered again into the ship, which had but just deposited its freight of blessing upon their shore to receive it back again. He left their coasts, never again to visit the benighted spot, never again to proffer to the sick and dying in that land His precious gifts of healing, never again to proclaim to that dark city the glad tidings of salvation, and to offer them peace and life through Himself. Doubtless He knew the hardness of their hearts; He saw the obstinacy of their unbelief; that their "heart was not but for their covetousness;" and, by complying with their blind request, He pronounced on them the awful sentence, "They are joined to idols; let them alone."*

Dearly beloved! do ye believe this to be indeed an awful sentence? Do ye feel that it would be indeed a fearful thing, to be left by the loving Saviour to the consequences of your own trans-

* Hosea iv. 17.

gression, to be given up by Him to impenitence and hardness of heart, to be by Him cast off for ever? O! I trust there can be none as yet so careless, so hardened, so impenitent, that they can willingly make up their minds to be given up by the gracious Saviour, to be left by Him to perish in their sins. Yet, beloved, let us endeavor to gather a lesson from the history of the Gergesenes, and enquire whether we are not in conduct, if not in words, rejecting the offers of the Saviour, and bidding Him depart from us, and leave us to ourselves. May the Spirit of the living God be with us to aid us in the attempt!

I. Let us consider then, beloved, in the first place, THE VISIT OF THE LORD JESUS. Unsolicited, unbidden, He came unto the land of the Gergesenes; and there, by a miraculous act, which at once conveyed a reproof of sin, and exhibited the riches of His mercy, He announced Himself as the Anointed of the Lord of hosts. In like manner, unsolicited, unbidden, He visits the souls of sinners; for never does the sinner seek Jesus, until Jesus has sought him; he rather, like the fallen Adam, flies to hide himself from God, and if the voice of the Lord came not to his hiding-place, saying, Sinner! where art thou? he would even remain there till the hail of God's judgment swept away his refuge,

and the rain of God's wrath overflowed his hiding-place.

And how may the visit of the Lord be recognised?

There are many ways in which the Lord visits both individuals and communities; let us at present observe only the two which bear some resemblance to the case of the text.

1. And first, Jesus comes to visit you, whenever, *by some striking dispensation of His providence*, He startles you in your security, calls your sin to your remembrance, and terrifies you by the intimations of His displeasure against iniquity.

How often is the Lord's presence thus manifested in a city or a parish, startling the community by some sudden dispensation, arresting the purpose of ungodly pleasure, interrupting the project of ungodly gain! How often is the Lord's presence manifested in one family or another, by the stroke of sickness or the hand of death, disturbing the thoughtless worldliness that prevailed, and forcing eternity upon the view! What individual is there, that has never throughout his life been called to recognise the presence of the Lord, to hear His voice, to see His hand, in the dispensations that have surrounded him? Hast thou never been arrested in any pursuit of pleasure, or project of gain, by the thought: This night thy soul may be

required of thee, and then whose shall these things be? * Hast thou never watched the bedside of friend, of parent, or of darling child, and traced with horror the approaching footsteps of dreaded death, and been forced then to look beyond death, and think of that Eternity that is beyond? Jesus was then visiting thy soul, and urging on thee the offers of His love. Hast thou never lain, thyself, upon a bed of sickness, and as thy pains forced on thee the unwelcome fear that death would soon claim thee as its prey, been constrained to think: My course of vanity is run; what have I now to bear me up against the terrors of the day of wrath? The Lord Jesus was then visiting thy soul, and calling thee amid these alarms to seek His face and live. O yes! beloved, with whatever terrors the voice of the Lord may seem laden in His providential calls to you, whatever fears the whirlwind and the fire may stir up within you, it is still a voice of mercy, a visit of tenderness and love, in which He would win you to Himself.

2. And, secondly, the Lord Jesus comes to visit you, whenever *by the power of His grace*, He brings some poor sinner from among you to His feet, a subdued, a converted, a sanctified soul.

There are times, when, in the riches of His

* Luke xii. 20.

grace, the Lord pours out largely of His Spirit upon a whole community, awakening multitudes from their sleep of sin, and causing hundreds to set out at once asking their way to Zion. Oh, how should His praying people among you, beloved, "ye that are the Lord's remembrancers," cry unto Him day and night, "and give Him no rest," till He vouchsafe thus to visit us in mercy, and pour upon us the rich showers of His converting grace! And yet there can scarcely be any time, in a community in which Christ is preached, when He does not manifest Himself, now and then, in bringing home His word to some poor sinner's heart, convincing him of sin, converting him to God. Sometimes the bold and careless profligate is arrested in the very midst of his career of sin, and brought in deep and heartfelt penitence to the cross of Christ, and he whose life had manifested that he was indeed possessed of the devil, is seen sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind. Sometimes the gentle, the amiable, the moral, one of whom even an envious world was saying, What could he lack more? if his were not a lovely character, what could be? this man, too, is brought to see that his heart has been deceitful and desperately wicked; he is led to renounce the vanities of a delusive world, and to give himself up as a follower of the cross of

Christ. Thanks be to God, beloved, He does, from time to time, thus manifest Himself among *you*. One and another is awakened, is aroused ; is led to see the vanity of the world, to renounce its follies, to seek the Lord, to take up His cross. And whenever it is so, the Lord Himself comes to visit you. The purposes of His love are not confined to the individuals whom He thus brings to His feet. In them would He display to *you* also His power, His grace, His tenderness, His love. In them would He commend Himself to you likewise as a Saviour ; by His graciousness to them would He bid, nay urge, and entreat you to come too, and taste and see how gracious the Lord is. Yes ! by His mercies to them, "He stands at the door" of your hearts, "and knocks," if any of you "hear his voice and open the door, He will come in to you, and will sup with you and ye with Him."*

II. Let us consider, in the second place, THE NATURE OF THE RECEPTION WHICH THE LORD JESUS MEETS WITH at the hands of those, whom in His tenderness and love He comes to visit.

When He visited the country of the Gergesenes, as soon as His presence became known, "the whole city came out to meet him ; and when they saw Him, they besought Him, that

* Rev. iii. 20.

He would depart out of their coasts." There was no violence, no railing, but a sullen, settled purpose, that they would not have Him among them. Is there not something fearfully resembling this in the conduct of the world towards the gospel of a crucified Jesus at the present day? It is no day of persecution for Christ's sake, of violent assault upon His followers, of indignant rejection of His name. Nay, the doctrines of the gospel, those which peculiarly distinguish it as a dispensation of free grace, meet with some measure of acceptance at the world's hands: the multitude would seem even to prefer the plain preaching of the cross of Christ to that which prophesies smooth things, and thus, as it were, they go out, like the Gergesenes, to meet Jesus. But is it to welcome Him into their hearts? Is it to take up His cross? Is it to invite Him to dwell within them, and to be indeed their Saviour from their sins? Alas! no! Their conduct, their conversation begs Him to depart. They wish for none of His indwelling; they will not have Him to abide with them.

And why is this?

The reasons of the reception which the world gives the blessed Jesus, may be briefly stated to be the same as those which influenced the Gergesenes; and of those we shall observe—

1. *A dislike of that strait and narrow way, in*

which alone the soul can walk with Christ. The Gergesenes perceived, by the lesson which the Lord had conveyed them by means of the swine, that he would make no compromise with sin. Already had one prospect of ungodly gain been blighted ; they knew not what sacrifice He might next demand, if He came to dwell among them ; and they loved their gains, they loved their sins too well to give a welcome to so holy a Saviour. And, "strive to enter in at the strait gate," is still the injunction of the Gospel of Christ ; "for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."* However gracious are the offers of salvation, which the Gospel brings, it is still perfectly evident, that it makes no terms with sin. It is better for thee to "pluck out a right eye," to "cut off a right hand," than "to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched ; where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched : "† this is the alternative which the Gospel offers. Men are called upon, then, to choose between God and Mammon, between the reproach of Christ and the pleasures of sin, between the gain of godliness and ungodly gain ; between the ways of God and the ways of their own heart. And alas ! the choice

* Luke xiii. 24 ; Matt. vii. 14.

† Matt. v. 29, 30 ; Mark ix. 43—48.

is too generally made in favor of their sins. They can bear to hear of Christ; they can approve of the doctrine of Christ; they like to be called Christians; but when it comes to a choice between the cross of Christ and their gains, their pleasures, or their sins, they cling to their own vanities, and bid the Lord depart. Dearly beloved, with how many of you is this the case? Ye like everything in the Gospel but the cross. Ye like its pure morality; ye like its simple ordinances; ye like the promises it brings; ye like the consolations it imparts; ye like the heaven it holds out;—all but the cross. Ye like not to be obliged to choose between your sins and Christ. Ye like not to be obliged to choose between the pleasures of this vain world, and the love of Jesus. Ye like not to be obliged to choose to give up your darling vanity, your bosom sin, or else to give up heaven. Ye will run your risk then. Go thy way, say ye, for this time; perhaps before I die I may think differently; when it is more convenient to give up my sins, I will send for thee; but now depart, depart; I beseech thee, torment me not!

2. Among the reasons for the world's reception of the blessed Jesus, may be mentioned an *ignorance of the true character of Christ*. The evil spirits, by which the demoniacs were possessed, cried out on seeing Jesus, "Art thou

come hither to torment us?" The presence of Christ is indeed a torment to the devil; and he has but too well succeeded in giving to the sinner his own impressions of the Saviour. The Gergesenes went out to meet Jesus as if He were come to torment them; and even the sight of the rescued demoniacs sitting at His feet could not convince them that His purpose was rather to bring peace and joy and blessedness in His train. And so the chief pleasures of which the world knows anything are the pleasures of sin; the happiest hours of unconverted men are those from which the gloomy thoughts of death and judgment are most completely banished, in which God is forgotten, and Jesus uncared for and unnamed. They have no idea, then, of any pleasure in the service of Jesus; they look upon the path of godliness as a gloomy and melancholy walk; they think that they are called upon to choose between mirth and moping; and that if they become religious, they must give up all idea of present happiness, for the sake of some future good. The sight of those who are enjoying peace with God does not convince them to the contrary; for, in truth, if these seem to them cheerful and happy, they rather cry out against them as inconsistent, and reproach them with the enjoyments they possess. How many a parent has thus mourned over a beloved child.

when he has seen that child devoting herself to Christ : — Alas ! that I should have incurred so much anxiety and expense in preparing her to make a goodly appearance in the world ; and now all these accomplishments are to be thrown away for a moping, melancholy life ! How many a worldly one has lamented over his friend : — Alas ! that one so fitted to shine in the world should have been so weak. See, he is lost to the world, and become a gloomy recluse ! This unhappy mistake keeps many a one away from the cross of Christ. The young are not prepared, just entering upon life, to give up all idea of pleasure, even if they must risk for it their soul's salvation. And they that have had a larger share of this world's joys, embittered as they have often been by disappointments, are not willing to give up the things on which their hearts are set, in exchange for gloom, and self-denial, and melancholy, and seclusion. How sad that they should so mistake the character of Jesus, as not to know that " His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace ; " * that there are peace and joy to be found in Christ, such as the world can never give, and, blessed be God ! can never take away. Yet, under this mistake, they reject the Saviour ; in this ignorance of His true character, they

* Prov. iv. 17.

beseech Him to depart. He may do well enough, say they, for a time of trouble; we should desire His consolations on the bed of sickness; we shall hope for His support in the hour of death, and to have Him for a friend in the day of judgment. But now! Oh no! Life is the time for enjoyment; we cannot give it all up for the melancholy strictness which the cross enjoins! Dearly beloved, is not this the language of full many a heart among you? Determined to look upon the service of Jesus as a gloomy service, ye turn away from the offers of his love. Ye put off, at least to a more convenient season, the admission of Christ into your hearts; and seem to think, that though ye may reject Him for any vanity, and prefer before Him every folly of the world, yet that when you grow tired of these, or they weary of you, ye have but to ask for Christ, and ye shall have at once the peace which He alone can give.

III. Let us notice, in the third place, THE DANGER OF REJECTING CHRIST. Though the consequences to the Gergesenes of their rejection of Jesus come not properly within the scope of our text, I shall yet, very briefly, allude to them, for the purpose of endeavoring to urge upon you, beloved, the danger that attends such conduct.

Unhappily for the Gergesenes, the Lord Jesus complied with their request: "He left them and departed:" and we read not that He ever visited that coast again. Poor creatures! they, perhaps, rejoiced and danced for joy when they saw His vessel on its way; and though there was many a sick one in their city, to whom His touch would have given health, many a sorrowing one, over whose heart His voice might have poured the sweetest consolation, these unhappy beings gloried in thus having persuaded Christ to leave them to themselves. Perhaps they never felt a wish to see him again upon their shores; they went on hardened in their indifference to Him, and died in darkness and in sin.

Dearly beloved, is not the bare idea that such a thing may be, enough to impress upon you the awful danger of trifling with the visits of the Saviour and closing your hearts against Him? There is a day of grace extended to you; but who can say how soon that day may close? I mean, not merely to remind you that your sun may go down, even at noon-day, in the darkness of death; but that an often-rejected Saviour may leave you to yourselves, rejoicing, perhaps, that ye have quieted the scruples of conscience—rejoicing, perhaps, that ye have silenced your troublesome convictions, till ye lie down in the

hopeless apathy of unbroken worldliness and sin. O! beloved, can anything be imagined more awful? Beware! I entreat you, beware! lest by continual worldliness, ye heap up this fearful treasure for yourselves!

The whole city came out to meet Jesus. There were young and old there mingled in the throng. And the youngest that was there, among those rejectors of Christ, may, the longest day he lived, have wished in vain to recal his words; for Jesus visited those coasts no more. And, my beloved, there are the young among you, whom Jesus visits in His love, and by His calls of providence and grace, invites you to receive Him to your hearts. And will ye now reject His offers, and refuse His calls? Beloved, there may be many days of life and health before you, ere you lie down in the cold grave; but if ye now reject the Saviour, if ye now resist the struggles of your conscience, and desire Jesus to depart from you, it may be, He will never visit you in love again. O! surely "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."* Delay not, I beseech you, turn not away, reject not Christ; to-morrow it may be too late to recal your words.

And, doubtless, the most prominent among those that desired Jesus to depart, were those

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

whose gains He interfered with, whose pleasures He disturbed. And it may be, that those among you, beloved, who least welcome Jesus, and are least willing to follow Him, are those with whose pleasures or whose profits His service would sadly interfere. Ye would gladly enough be Christians, if it did not constrain you to give up too much. And will ye follow after any gain, upon which ye cannot ask the blessing of Jesus; will ye reject Him for the sake of any pleasures, upon which His presence would cast a gloom? When will the convenient season come, if that which makes it inconvenient now is your love of pleasure or your love of gain? O! beware! beloved, how ye for these things reject the loving Jesus, and receive not His call. Felix sent again for Paul, not because it was more convenient to hear him, but because, in his yet deeper worldliness, he hoped for money from him.*

Yet one there was that would have followed Christ; he out of whom the legion had been cast prayed Him that he might be with Him; howbeit, Jesus suffered him not, but bade him return and tell his friends what great things the Lord had done for him.† And thus He would teach you, beloved, whom He has brought as convinced sinners to His feet, and given you

* Acts xxiv. 25, 26.

† Mark v. 18, 19.

peace, that He would have you abide in the calling wherein ye have been called. He would not have every converted man renounce his worldly calling, and become a preacher of the cross. There are some who have greater opportunities of glorifying Him by abiding as they are. Ye may be missionaries in your own families, or in the circle in which ye move. Ye may, by your words and by your life, declare to your friends what Christ has done for you. Has He saved you, beloved? Has He delivered you from the bondage of the devil, and made you free with the glorious liberty of the sons of God? O! see that by your conduct and your conversation ye show how He has blessed you, and by your heavenly and rejoicing walk, allure all those around you to come and taste for themselves, how gracious the Lord is!

SERMON XVII.

BE READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER.

1 PET. III. 15.

*Be ready always to give an answer to every man
that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in
you with meekness and fear.*

THIS caution was penned for times of trial and persecution. It was addressed to the Church at a period when the profession of the name of Christ involved danger to the professor, and the "hope which maketh not ashamed" was enjoyed in the midst of perils and assaults, well calculated to test the strength of the foundations on which it rested. The whole passage in connexion with my text speaks of the fiery trials of various kinds to which the Christian was exposed. It speaks of a "suffering for righteousness' sake;" it refers to believers as being "evil-spoken of, as though they were evil doers;" it

suggests, how far "better it is to suffer for well-doing, than for evil doing," as though reproach, assault, and persecution were the natural and necessary result of a consistent following of Christ.

There cannot be a doubt, however we may rejoice that the day for such persecution has passed by, that the trials which surrounded the profession of a love for Christ and an interest in His salvation, tended much to make that profession a more deliberate and spiritual matter, than it is in days such as these. When they that would go after Jesus must literally "take up their cross,"—a cross of outward persecutions as well as of inward conflicts with sin,—“and follow Him;” when the profession of the faith of Christ was the sure way to persecution, suffering, and scorn; when the faithful and consistent disciple of the Lord Jesus must as surely calculate upon perils and privations here, as he earnestly hoped for an inheritance unfading and eternal, laid up for him hereafter; then would it be no light thing to profess one's self a follower of Jesus; then would men be likely to count the cost before taking up the cross of Christ; then would it be indeed necessary to have some lively and animating and sustaining hope to bear one up against the trials that assailed the disciple of the Lord.

And the difference between those days and the present is not so great, as at first sight might appear, excepting as regards the *profession* of the name of Christ. *Then*, indeed, the mere profession was attended with so many dangers, that it was rarely made except in cases where the faith which was professed was a lively and genuine principle, where the hope which was avowed was that, which really "entered into that within the veil;" while *now*, on the contrary, the mere profession of Christianity is so general, it is rather a reproach and shame to any one not to be in name at least a Christian, not to be a partaker of those Christian ordinances, which constitute one a member of the visible Church of Christ. Still, as in the days in which the Apostle penned the text, it was not profession *alone* that excited the hatred of the world, but the inward grace which was exhibited, the "faith working by love," the renouncing of the world, the following after holiness; so, in the present day, does a genuine profession of vital godliness incur the world's contempt, and the genuine following of Jesus involve the taking up a daily cross, just as much as when the cross of Christ became first "a stumbling-block to the Jew," and was regarded as "foolishness" by the Greek.*

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

If this be so, beloved, it cannot but be as necessary now, as at any period of the Christian Church, that every one, who truly comes out and separates himself from the world, and in singleness of heart takes upon him the yoke of Christ, should be able and "ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him." The children of this world, while they comprehend not the principles on which the believer acts, yet perceive the conduct and conversation to which those principles lead. They see one, professing to have discovered of himself that he is polluted and vile, the chief of sinners, and yet, in connexion with this knowledge, enjoying a sense of God's favor, a consciousness of His love, a hope, a confidence, of sharing His glory; and they ask, some tauntingly, some sincerely, an explanation of this mystery. They see one, whose heart appeared to be set in a peculiar measure upon the vanities and pleasures, the honors or the gains of this world, suddenly giving them all up, and perhaps in the very prime of life, when the pleasures of sin are most enticing, when earthly prospects are most bright, and earthly joys most sweet, forsaking all these things; seeking his pleasures in retirement, meditation, and prayer; and casting in his lot among those who are a separate and a peculiar people. And with the contempt that this

change so frequently inspires, there is sometimes mingled up a real anxiety to know, *what it is* that can so check the stream of earthly vanity, and lead the soul at once to find its happiness and joy in things, which but a short time before it counted foolishness. For the sake, therefore, of such enquirers, as well as for his own sake, and for the glory of his Lord, does it concern the true follower of Jesus, as much at this day, as at any period of the Gospel dispensation, to "be ready to give an answer to every one that asketh a reason of the hope that is in him."

With the earnest desire, then, beloved, that an examination of this subject may conduce to the edification of those that love the Lord Jesus, and may tend to allure some who are yet of the world, by the sweetness of the hope which the Christian enjoys, to cast in their lot with the people of the Lord, I would invite your attention this afternoon to a consideration of the admonition, which the Apostle urges in the text. And I would entreat your prayers, that the grace and teaching of the Holy Spirit may be poured out upon us, and enable me so to speak, and you so to hear, as shall be for our mutual profit and growth in godliness and grace.

In considering, then, the Apostle's admonition in the text, let us notice, first, **WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE**; secondly, **WHAT ARE THE**

WARRANTS FOR THIS HOPE; and, thirdly, HIS DUTY TO BE READY TO GIVE A REASON OF THIS HOPE; and may the Spirit of the living God be with us to bless these considerations to our souls!

I. In the first place, let us observe THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE.

1. It is, first, a *precious* hope; precious, for it concerns the things most important to the soul's peace; precious, for it is "full of immortality," and lays hold, as it were, of the glories, which are laid up at God's right hand for all that love and serve Him. How different, then, is it from the worldling's hope! That is chiefly set upon the things of this life, and is thus as sure of disappointment, as the things of the world are sure to be fleeting, unsatisfying, and vain. I mean not, that the worldling never reaches the things on which his hopes are set; but when he has gained them all, he finds them so unsatisfactory, that, like the African traveller, who, after years of weariness and toil, arrived at last at the source of the Niger, he weeps with disappointment as he exclaims, "And is this all?" But the Christian's hope is set upon the things which, though "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have they entered into the heart of man" to conceive,* are yet "revealed

* 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

by the Spirit," as surely laid up at God's right hand for them that believe in Jesus. It is a hope, then, beside which all the pleasures and the joys of earth sink into insignificance; for who, that had a lively hope of the pure and spiritual joys which are at God's right hand forever, could allow his thoughts to dwell, or his affections to be engaged, upon the vanities of earth? It is a hope, in the light of which the trials and afflictions of earth lose their severity; for we "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.* For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."†

2. The Christian's hope is, secondly, a *present* hope; a hope, I mean, which the soul enjoys in its present state of trial, amounting to a confidence of God's favor now, and of His glory hereafter. "This hope we have," the Apostle Paul saith, "as an anchor of the soul."‡ It is not then a mere vague idea, that at the last our sins shall be pardoned, our deficiencies overlooked, and our souls made meet for the glory of the Lord. *This* is not the Christian's hope; for a notion so vague as this could neither strengthen him against the temptations

* Rom. viii. 18.

† 2 Cor. iv. 17.

‡ Heb. vi. 19.

of the world, nor sustain him amid the trials and afflictions by which he may be encompassed. But it is a hope, a confidence, of present pardon and acceptance with God; it is a hope, a confidence, that our sins have been laid upon Jesus, and blotted out with His blood, and so shall be remembered against us no more for ever; and it is thus a hope, a confidence, such as is itself a foretaste of the joys that are anticipated, of an entrance, in the Lord's good time, upon the glories of the Redeemer's kingdom. It was such a hope as this that sustained the Apostles in their arduous work; it was such a hope as this, that put songs of joy into the mouths of martyrs, while the flames of persecution curled about their feeble frames; it is such a hope as this, a *present* hope, which cheers the Christian now amid the trials of his earthly pilgrimage, and enables him to make light, as well of the smile, as of the frown, of an ensnaring but ungodly world.

3. The Christian's hope is, thirdly, a *personal* hope. The text speaks of it to those whom it addresses, as "the hope that is in you." In this, again, how very different is it from the vague hope we too often hear expressed. Too many seem to have little more than a general idea that Christ died for sinners, and a hope that they will stand as good a chance, as other

sinners do, of being saved by Him at last. They are not, they think, worse than many others are, who yet hope to be saved ; and they trust that a merciful God will be as merciful to them, as to thousands of others who are no more religious than they. How weak, how foolish would such reasonings be thought in the concerns of this life! Though all the world should be going headlong to destruction, that does not in the least affect my duty of fleeing from the wrath to come. Though all the rest of the world should be saved, that would not make it less a truth to me, that except I believe, except I repent, except I be converted, I cannot see God. My salvation, the salvation of each one of us, beloved, is a personal concern. And my hope of salvation is not a Christian hope, unless I have, for myself, laid hold of the only true grounds of hope, and have personally become interested in Christ's salvation.

4. It is only such a personal hope as this, that can be, what the Christian's, fourthly, is, a *purifying* hope. It is because the hope professed by nominal Christians is so general, so vague, so indefinite, that it has so little effect upon their lives. Men are acted upon in the same way by their hopes and fears in spiritual as in temporal things. If some worldly pleasure tempt me, I shall not be ready

to renounce it, unless I have some better hope, some lively expectation of a far higher joy, with which this worldly joy is incompatible, to aid me in the choice. If some heavy trial bear me down, I shall not be able patiently and cheerfully to acquiesce in it, unless I feel that it is laid upon me by the hand of Him who loves me, and hope, yea, am confident, that it is one of the ways in which He is fitting me for His glory. "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."* He that has a Scriptural confidence that he is a child of God will aim at walking like a child of God. He that has a lively hope of dwelling with Christ for ever, will desire and aim to be conformed to the image of Christ, that so he may be capable of enjoying His presence.

II. We are, in the second place, to consider THE WARRANTS FOR THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE; the reasons which the Scripture furnishes for the indulgence of this personal, this present, this precious confidence of acceptance with God now, and of a share in His glories hereafter.

And this warrant is three-fold, the pledge, as it were, of the Eternal Trinity, viz., *the Word of God, the work of Christ, and the witness of the Spirit.*

* 1 John iii. 3.

1. And first, *the Word of God* ; by which I here mean, the testimony, the promise, the assurance of God, as contained in the revelation of His will to man. For "God," saith the Apostle, to the Hebrews, "willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath : that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."* Now "this," saith St. John, "is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life."† And "this," saith St. Paul, quoting from the Prophet Jeremiah the words of the new covenant, which God hath made in Christ Jesus, "this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts : and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people ; for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."‡ Here, then, beloved, is surely some warrant for confidence, some ground for hope. The God "with whom we have to do ;" the God who made us, and to whom we are therefore accountable ; the God whom we have offended, and whose wrath

* Heb. vi. 17, 18.

† 1 John ii. 25.

‡ Heb. viii. 10, 12.

we deserve, hath freely, graciously, promised eternal life, hath covenanted present forgiveness and everlasting joy, to every one that will but take Him at His word. Beloved, if any fellow-man of acknowledged integrity gave us his word of promise, we should feel that we were insulting him, if we asked him to confirm it by an oath. But God, in His infinite condescension, *has* confirmed *His* promise "by an oath." What more can we require?

2. Yet, secondly, the Word, the promise, the covenant of God is connected with, and in a measure limited by, the work of Christ; and this, *the finished work of Jesus*, finished when He bowed His blessed head upon the tree, and gave up the ghost, is the sure foundation of the Christian's hope. For "all the promises of God IN HIM are yea, and IN HIM Amen, to the glory of God by us."* It is the Word, the promise of the Father, which encourages the sinner to draw near to God with hope of present acceptance and of future joy; but it is only through Jesus, that any can come to the Father.† And what, then, is the warrant, which the work of Jesus gives for the believer's hope? Even this: that it provides the only way, by which the sinner's soul can be at peace with God; it opens the only fountain, in which sin and uncleanness can

* 1 Cor. i. 20.

† John xiv. 6.

be washed away ; it furnishes the only righteousness, in which a guilty sinner can appear before a holy God ; it supplies an abundant satisfaction to divine justice for the multiplied iniquities of man ; and removes every impediment that blocked up his way to God. Here, then, is a warrant for hope. How can I have a good hope that I am accepted with God, an object of His favor and His love, while I am a guilty sinner ? The Lord Himself hath laid mine iniquities upon Jesus, and blotted them out with His blood. How can I have a good hope of entering into that pure and holy heaven where the Father dwells, since I am so polluted ? Jesus died ; He died for me ; and His " blood cleanseth from all sin."*

3. Strong, however, as are these grounds for hope, there is yet necessary, thirdly, *the witness of the Spirit*, to warrant that personal, that sure and certain hope, which alone is sustaining, purifying, precious. The promise of the Lord is sure, and even " if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful ; He cannot deny Himself,"† though we refuse to trust His word. The work of Christ is precious ; and His blood does not lose its value in the sight of God, though we trample it under our feet. But they are only warrants for our hope, as we believe and trust in

* 1 John i. 7.

† 2 Tim. ii. 13.

them; and this we will not, cannot do, except through the power of the Spirit of God, convincing us of sin, bearing witness to us of Jesus, and sanctifying us through the sprinkling of His blood. In vain for us will have been the condescension of the Father in promising eternal life, if we believe not His promise. In vain for us will have been the shedding of the blood of Jesus, if we come not by faith to Him, and are not washed in His blood. By nature our hearts are at enmity with God; the cross of Christ is foolishness to the natural mind; and nothing but the Spirit of God can subdue this enmity, and make the cross of Christ precious in our eyes. But if the Spirit of the Living God hath come, and taken up His abode within us; if He hath convinced us of our sin, and led us in deep consciousness of guilt to cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" if He hath led us to the cross of Christ, and there spoken peace to our souls; if He hath sprinkled the blood of Jesus upon our consciences, thereby "purging them from dead works to serve the Living God;" if He hath drawn our souls into communion with God, so that we can look to Him as a Father, and lean upon Him as a Friend; if He hath taught us to delight in prayer and praise, to find comfort and joy in God's Word, to esteem "His Sabbaths a delight, the holy of the Lord, honor-

able;”* if He hath filled us with a desire for heaven as a pure and holy place, and made us long for it even more because it is a holy, than because it is a happy abode;—then surely we have some warrant, some solid reason for the hope—which yet we build upon the Word of the Father and the work of Christ—that we are indeed God’s children, and “joint-heirs with Christ” of His glory.

III. Now, if these are the warrants which the true believer has for the hope that is in him, can it yet be necessary to urge upon any one who thus enjoys it, THE DUTY, which we proposed in the third place to consider, OF BEING ALWAYS READY TO GIVE A REASON FOR THIS HOPE? It is so indeed; and that, because of the very feature of this hope, which makes it so precious and so influential; its being, namely, a *personal* hope, based, not only upon the Word of God and the work of Christ, but also upon the witness of the Spirit. So long as those who call themselves Christians go on in the ways of the world, and yet hope to be saved at last, the world does not concern itself about their hopes, nor care how weak, how groundless they may be. But when one who professes to hope for heaven begins to walk consistently with that hope, to renounce

* Isa. lviii. 13.

what he believes would unfit him for heaven, and interfere with his communion with God, and to seek above all things God's glory and the "things which accompany salvation," then the world is ready enough to cry out against the folly of such a course, and to demand the reason for a conduct, which seems so strongly to condemn its own. And shall the Christian shrink from such a demand? Shall he be ashamed or afraid to give a reason for the hope that is in him, and which leads him thus to renounce the world and follow Christ? O! surely no! Surely it is his duty to "be always ready to give an answer to every one that asketh him," and that *with boldness and consistency*. The true believer now has as little reason as St. Paul had to be "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." He has found it to be "the power of God to his salvation."* He has found in it the pardon of his sins, peace with God, a sanctifying principle of conduct, a purifying hope of heaven. And shall he be ashamed or afraid to avow the source of all his confidence, to point out the ground of all his comforts, to declare the principle which leads him to renounce the world, to contend against sin, to follow after holiness, to live for heaven? O! who can tell the injury that has been done to the cause of Christ and His Gospel by the

* Rom. i. 16.

backwardness of His followers to bear a faithful and consistent testimony to the power of the truth, in the face of the taunts, the sneers, the hatred of the world?

Yet further, the Apostle enjoins that the Christian's answer should be characterized by "*meekness and fear.*" And this is but to urge him, that he should show herein, as in every part of his conversation, the mind which was in Christ. How little indeed would it become one, who professes to hope that he is saved by grace, to answer taunts with taunts, and to reply to the sneers or reviling of the world with angry retribution. And what is the "fear," by which his answers should be marked? Is it a fear, lest, after all, his hope may be deceitful and his expectation vain? Is it a fear, lest God may prove unfaithful, or his confidence in Christ misplaced, or the strictness of conduct, to which his hope has led, unnecessary? Nay, surely not! But simply the fear, lest by any departure from "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," he may give the adversary an occasion of reproach, and bring dishonor upon the cause he loves. The trials of spirit, to which a believer is exposed in this way, are among the most severe which assail him. It were easy to give an account of his hope to those, who in candor and sincerity should seek the information; but when the

enquiry is made in a taunting spirit, and accompanied by a suspicion of hypocrisy, or a charge of fanaticism, it is not easy to repress the idea, that such a suspicion justifies *some* warmth, such a charge warrants *some* indignation. Yet at this would the enemy rejoice; over this the ungodly triumph. Herein, as in all things else, the believer must take pattern from Christ, "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously:"* for thus will he best ensure the peace of his own soul, and thus will he give an answer, far better than words could furnish, concerning the nature of the hope that is in him.

Dearly beloved in the Lord, whosoever of you are cheered and sustained by the "hope that maketh not ashamed," let me urge on you the admonition of the text. Let me urge on you the duty, the solemn duty, of looking continually to the foundation on which your hope is built, and of being "ready to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Yet how vague, how pointless, will those answers be, unless ye are really living upon the hope ye profess, and, as ye hope for heaven, are having your conversation there.

* 1 Pet. ii. 23.

The best answer to any enquiries concerning the nature of your hope, is a godly life. Ye may be unable to answer the caviller; ye may be weak in controversy upon the foundations of your faith; but, if ye have peace with God, and love for Christ, and joy in the Holy Ghost, ye have a proof of the genuineness of your hope, of which no cavil can deprive you; if ye are "walking in love, as Christ also hath loved you,"* and are "purifying yourselves even as Christ is pure,"† ye give an evidence of the scriptural nature of your hope, which no sneer can weaken, no argument can overthrow.

But are there not those of you, beloved, who have no hope; "no hope," because ye are "without God in the world?"‡ And are ye ready to give to Him, who shall call you to account, a reason for your being without God, and therefore without hope? O! beloved! if it be difficult to understand how those, who profess the bright and glorious hope of the Christian, can yet so often walk in a worldly, careless manner, so inconsistent with that hope—is it not yet more difficult to understand, how so many of you can believe ye have immortal souls, and yet go on satisfied with a vague and general and powerless hope; in short, with no well-grounded hope at all? Dearly beloved! let me

* Eph. v. 2.

† 1 John iii. 3.

‡ Eph. ii. 12.

entreat you to consider this. The time is coming, that "judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" And O! "if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"*

* 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.

SERMON XVIII.

RETURN UNTO ME.

ISAIAH XLIV. 22.

I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins : return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.

OF the salvation which is by Christ Jesus, the prophets "enquired and searched diligently, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."*

And not only have prophets gazed in wonder upon the mystery of redemption, as that mystery lay before them in the dim perspective of the distant future, and have blessed God for the glimmer which caught their eye from the dawning in coming times of the "Dayspring from

* 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

on high ;" the very "angels," as they fold their wings above the mercy-seat, "desire to look into"* the amazing plan of reconciliation between a lost world and an offended God, and pore in mute astonishment over the wonders of that love, which brought their Lord and King down from the glories of His heavenly throne, and prompted the surrender of His life upon the accursed tree, for the salvation of lost man.

And yet, how strange the apathy with which the ears of those to whom the message of this great salvation comes, receive the tidings which announce it ; how sad the listlessness, with which a large proportion of the world pass by, as a thing wherein they feel no deep concern, the revelation of that mystery which was "hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints"† by Jesus Christ ! How sad the unconcern with which is put away from them the question, What interest have I in the "good tidings of great joy" announced now to "all people?"‡ how painful the indifference, with which so many turn aside unheeding from the call, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."§

Yet, still the message is repeated. Still the

* 1 Pet. i. 12.

† Col. i. 26.

‡ Luke ii. 10.

§ Matt. ix. 28.

invitation is given. Still the Lord Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Still, in the soft accents of His love, He entreats admission to the sinner's heart. By the startling dispensations of His providence, calling the young, the vigorous, the active, in a moment into His presence; by the no less impressive, though less startling lessons, which the more gradual decay of youth, of manhood, of old age, and the severance of those endearing ties which have bound hearts together, are so well fitted to inculcate; by the external ministrations of the Word of life, which hold Him up upon the cross, and cry in His name, "Look unto me, and be ye saved;"* and by the inward monitions of a stricken conscience, in which the Spirit of the Lord strives with man's sinful heart to lead it to the Saviour; by these things the Lord appeals to sinners, yea, beloved, by these He appeals to *you*, to come to Him for life.

It is a message from the Lord Himself which is borne to you this afternoon in the words of the text. Man's message may be disregarded; man's ministry despised: but here He who came into the world to save sinners speaks to you Himself. Man's views may be erroneous; his interpretations of God's word unsound; but here He speaks to you, who is Himself "the

* Isa. xlv. 22.

Way, the Truth, and the Life."* Man's heart may be cold and uncharitable, and thus his report of his Master's may be tinged with undue severity; but he who speaks, whose name is Love, and who so loved a guilty world, a world of sinners, as to give Himself a ransom for men's souls. Give heed, then, beloved, I pray you, to His call; hearken to the message of His love; come and close with the offers of His mercy, and accept His great salvation. "I have blotted out," He says, "as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

The consideration of these words of our Lord Jesus, addressed by the mouth of His prophet in old time to the Jews, who, notwithstanding the Lord's continued goodness, were prone to depart from Him, and now addressed to every sinner within hearing of the Word of life, suggests to us a view, first, of THE CONDITION OF THE PERSONS ADDRESSED, as implied in the language of the text; secondly, of THE MERCY ANNOUNCED to them; and thirdly, of THE DUTY ENJOINED on the ground of the mercy so freely and so graciously proclaimed. May the blessed Spirit of the Eternal God, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and show them†

* John xiv. 6.

† John xvi. 14, 15.

to our souls, be graciously present to apply the Word, and bring home the message of salvation to many a poor sinner's heart !

I. Consider, then, in the first place, beloved, THE IMPLIED CONDITION OF THOSE TO WHOM THE TEXT IS ADDRESSED.

1. The invitation, to "return," implies a *state of alienation* on the part of those to whom that message comes. The Jews, to whom in the first instance the language of the text was addressed, had, though favored with many privileges and continual blessings from the Lord, gone astray from His service into idolatry. Their hearts had become estranged from Him by the vain images which the heathen worshipped; and, blinded in their sin, they cut down a tree, with part of which they dressed their food, while to part they bowed down in blasphemous adoration.* And, though no outward idolatry engage the external homage of the sinners of our day, yet is there not a sad resemblance between their natural condition and that of the apostate Jews? Favored with many blessings, both in providence and grace, yet how are the vast majority of nominal Christians alienated from the spiritual service of the Lord Jesus Christ; how do they give their heart's affections to "the

* Isa. xliv. 14—17.

world, and the things that are in the world ;” how do they “ worship and serve the creature more than the Creator !” * “ As soon as they are born, they go astray :” † they grow up amid the vanities of the world, indifferent to God, and careless of His will ; they go on, engaging perhaps for custom or form’s sake in the external duties of religion, yet deeming the spiritual service of the Lord a gloomy service, and putting off, from day to day, and year to year, the surrender of their hearts to Him who bought them with the price of His own blood. The fascinations of the world strike them in tempting contrast with the dulness of religion ; the cares and business and pursuits of daily life engross so much attention as to leave little time or thought for God ; the flesh pleads successfully for indulgence and carnal ease, and the heart settles down into indifference to God, and to His claims upon its spiritual service. How many are there of whom this is a true, however feeble, description ! They may be free from the grosser abominations of vicious indulgence ; they may be free from any open outbreaks of abandoned iniquity ; but they have no love for God ; their hearts are indifferent to His calls ; they are in spirit alienated from His service. To such the invitation of the Lord Jesus comes, “ Return unto me !”

* Rom. i. 25.

† Ps. lvi. 3.

2. The announcement which the text contains implies, secondly, in the case of those to whom it is addressed, *a state of deep and deadly sin*. Their sin is as a cloud, their transgressions as a thick cloud, rising up between them and the Lord, hiding from them the light of God's countenance, shrouding them in the darkness of the shadow of death. And surely, though there be no outward adoration of a senseless idol, provoking the Lord to His face, the condition of the worldly, the unregenerate, the unconverted to God, is a state of positive sin. Although *we* may use the term *indifference* to God as describing what many conceive to be the state of their own feelings towards Him, the Lord admits of no such condition. His claim upon His creatures' hearts is a claim of love. He demands such love of Himself as engages all the affections, engrosses all the understanding, calls forth all the energies, takes full possession of the soul;* and everything short of this is SIN. He that does not thus love God is looked upon by the Lord as hating Him. "The carnal mind is *enmity* against God."† A divided heart is, as an offering, an abomination : His sight. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."‡

And who is there, then, that will place himself in the light which this pure and holy law of God pours forth upon him, and examining

* Luke x. 27.

† Rom. viii. 7.

‡ Matt. vi. 24.

his thoughts, his words, his deeds by the measure of the commandments, deny that his soul is stained with deep and deadly sin against the pure and holy God? Yea, who can there be, that looks upon himself at all as the Lord regards him, and does not confess and feel that his sins have accumulated over his head, that his transgressions have so multiplied, as to be like a thick cloud, separating between him and an offended God? The "imagination of the thoughts of his heart has been only evil, continually;"* his words have often been careless, idle, unprofitable words; his actions have not aimed at God's glory, nor been devoted to His praise. O how necessary, then, to him the call to "Return" unto the Lord; "so iniquity shall not be his ruin."†

II. Let us proceed to consider, in the second place, beloved, THE MERCY ANNOUNCED by the Lord Jesus in the text. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins."

1. And we observe, first, concerning the mercy thus announced, that it is a *costly* blessing. It is a blessing procured for a guilty world in the way of redemption or purchase. It is a blessing, which, to speak it with all

* Gen. vi. 5.

† Ezek. xviii. 30.

reverence, the Lord Himself could not confer upon our ruined race, except at an amazing cost. He loved the world, He yearned over his fallen creatures, and even when they were "dead in sins," a loathsome object to a pure and holy God, He longed for their salvation. But that salvation could only be accomplished by the payment of the full penalty incurred by man's transgression; by the satisfaction, even to the minutest tittle, of the claims which His justice urged against our sinning race. For this, then, He gave up His only Son, His well-beloved, to insult, suffering, and death. For this the blessed Jesus took on Him our flesh, and "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* For this He was lifted up upon the accursed tree, and by the blood that trickled from His thorn-crowned brow, and gushed from His wounded side, He proclaimed the penalty of man's transgressions paid, and the Lord's justice satisfied with all for whom that blood was shed. Here, then, is mercy indeed! Draw near and look upon the sight, ye who enquire how a merciful and gracious God can punish with everlasting anguish the transgressions of His offending creatures. See what the Lord endured in order that He might not be compelled to punish sinners. See at what a cost

* Phil. ii. 8.

He opened the door of access to Himself, that so He might invite sinners to come to Him and live. No sinner need perish now, whatever his transgressions may have been, who will but accept the pardon offered, who will but put out his hand to receive the acquittance sealed with blood. And can mercy offer more than this? Can love do more than this? Is God unmerciful who taketh vengeance upon those, who will not even flee for refuge from His wrath, to the cross where bleeds the Lamb of God?

2. The mercy announced is, secondly, a *complete and finished* blessing. He who addresses to sinners' hearts the invitation of the text, bowed not His blessed head upon the tree until with a loud voice He had proclaimed, "It is finished;"* and "by one offering, He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."† The work of atonement was completed. The price required for man's redemption has been paid. Justice has been fully satisfied. The handwriting of accusations against guilty man has been nailed to the cross.‡ Nothing more is to be done to procure man's pardon. Nothing more is required to wash out his guilt. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." The work is done. Nothing is left for the sinner but to accept the

* John xix. 30.

† Heb. x. 14.

‡ Col. ii. 14.

mercy offered. Nothing is required of him but to embrace the great salvation. It is only in such a view as this of the salvation which has been accomplished, that we can understand or reconcile with the remainder of God's Word the invitation, "Be ye reconciled to God." Estranged as man is by sin from his Creator, he needs indeed to come, and give up his enmity, and be reconciled and at peace with God. But is this all he needs? Is it only estrangement that is to be overcome; only enmity to be subdued? What becomes of man's guilt—the accumulation of his sins, that rose up as a thick cloud between him and the Lord? It is all taken out of the way. The Lord hath laid it upon Jesus. "He hath made Him to be sin *for us*, who knew no sin."* There is nothing now between the sinner and his God but his own rebellious inclination, his own stubborn will, keeping him back from God. Only let him come, and seek reconciliation with the Lord, and the beams of the Sun of Righteousness will disperse the cloud of his sins, like the thick mist before the morning sun; he will find that his guilt has been blotted out, his iniquity forgiven, his sin covered. In an interesting sketch of a deaf and dumb boy, who died at an early age rejoicing in Christ Jesus, this account is given of

* 2 Cor. v. 21.

his simple view concerning the application of the atonement:—"I saw the books opened," he said, "on the great day; and there was one page with my name at the head of it, on which were written all the sinful thoughts, and words, and acts of my whole life. I trembled when God took this leaf into His hand; but I soon saw that even though He held it in the bright light of the sun, He could not read one of the things recorded there against me; for Christ had taken the book, and, passing His 'red hand' over the page, had left nothing visible there but the blood which had flown from His palm, when pierced by the nails on Calvary."

3. We observe, thirdly, that the mercy announced is as *free* in its announcement, as it is complete in its accomplishment. "Go ye into all the world," is our Saviour's own command, "and preach the Gospel to every creature."* And what is this Gospel? What are these "good tidings of great joy?" Surely none other than this proclamation of our text: "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." Behold an instance of the preaching of this Gospel. When the jailor at Philippi, trembling and affrighted, sprang in and fell down before Paul and Silas, saying, "Sirs,

* Mark xvi. 15.

what must I do to be saved?" their answer was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."* Believe; but believe what? Believe that Christ has blotted out thy sins; believe that the scroll of thy transgressions has been nailed to His cross; believe "that God hath given to thee eternal life, and this life is in His Son;"† believe this, and be at peace; believe this, and thou art saved.

And the glad tidings of the Gospel of Christ Jesus address themselves now, in the same strain, to the whole race of sinners. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and ye, too, shall be saved. But believe what? Believe the message of the text, that Christ has blotted out your sins; that the Lord has laid your iniquities upon Him; that He has borne your sins in His own body on the tree; that your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake. Believe this message, and your belief of it makes the message yours, with all the blessings in its train. Believe it not, and your unbelief makes God a liar, rejects His amazing mercy, casts back upon Him the gracious offers of His love. The salvation is accomplished; the atonement is complete. The message of mercy which announces it speaks of it as a finished work, and urges upon every sinner the acceptance of its blessings.

* Acts xvi. 30, 31.

† 1 John v. 11.

The message of the Lord is not, Come unto me, and I *will then* blot out your sins; believe on me, and I *will then* redeem you from your iniquities. This would give man a part, as it were, in his own salvation. But He speaketh on this wise: I *have* blotted out your sins; believe this, and be at peace; I *have* redeemed you from death; *therefore* return unto Me.

III. We are thus led, in the third place, to consider, as we proposed, THE DUTY ENJOINED, ON THE GROUND OF THE MERCY WHICH IS THUS GRACIOUSLY ANNOUNCED. "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

1. This call urges upon the sinner, first, *the renunciation of those sins by which his heart has been enthralled*. And what call can be so successful as one based on such a plea as this? We set before sinners the degrading, the demoralizing nature of all sin, and the fatal consequences to which sin will surely lead. And they reply, that they know all this; still sin is too enticing to be so easily given up. We paint to them the beauties of virtue, and urge on them the cultivation of its graces, because it is so elevating, so ennobling to the soul. They join, perhaps, in a cold praise of its loveliness; and go on in sin as before. But when we hold up Christ Jesus crucified by their sins—when

HE is set forth, pointing to His wounds which their iniquities have pierced, and pleading with sinners to renounce those sins, for which He has bled, that He might save them from eternal fire—though still there be many, alas! who turn away their eyes as though they could not bear the sight, yet again are there others to whom this message of the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation.” And thus the Lord Jesus stands and pleads with sinners now. Behold, He cries, I have redeemed you, though it cost the shedding of my blood to purchase you from death; look at my bleeding hands; gaze on my wounded feet; see the spear plunged into my side. It was *your* sin that drove those nails; it was *your* sin that pointed that spear into my heart; and will ye still hug the transgressions which thus pierced me; will ye still cling to the iniquities which nailed me to the tree? Nay, nay; “return unto me, for I have redeemed you.”

2. The call of the text is, secondly, *a call for the full and cordial surrender of the affections of the heart to God.* Long since has the command been given; long since the duty been enjoined—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”*

* Deut. vi. 5; Mark xii. 30.

But such, alas! has been the estrangement of man's heart from God, that the command, so reasonable in itself, and so gracious in the promises annexed to it, has appealed to him in vain. Yet surely, if anything can claim man's love, and draw him from his enmity to God, it is such an appeal as that of the text. See, says the bleeding Saviour, see how I have loved you. Enemies, as ye were, estranged from God and holiness, and given up to wickedness, yea, "dead in trespasses and sins," even then *I loved you*, and came down to die for you. Come, see the measure of my love for you. Come with me to the anguish of Gethsemane; stand by me as they buffet and scourge me in the judgment-hall; gaze, among the women afar off, upon my agonies on the accursed tree; and hear my bitter cry, for your sakes, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" This I have done for you. At such a cost as this, I purchased you from destruction. And what is it that I ask of you? Your hearts. "Return unto me, for I have redeemed you;" you are mine. Give me your hearts; and I shall "see in you the travail of my soul, and shall be satisfied."* Too many, alas! treat even this appeal with indifference and contempt. Yet who can heed it, and not love Him who first so loved them?† Who can

* Isa. liii. 11.

† 1 John iv. 19.



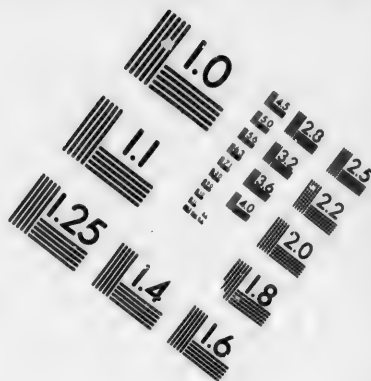
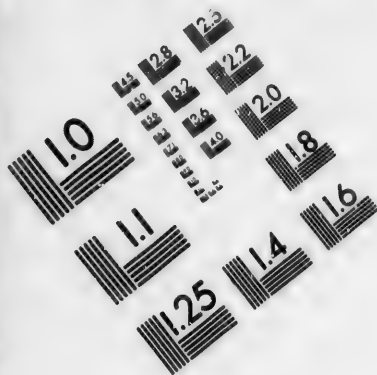
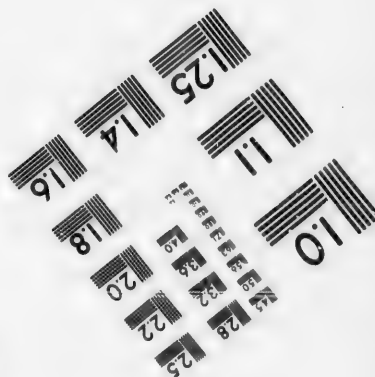
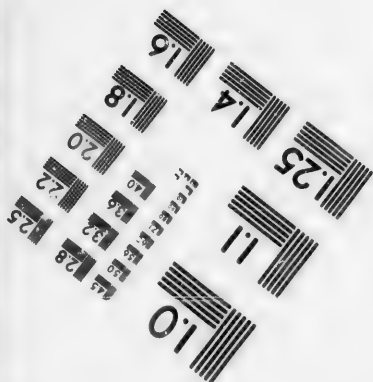
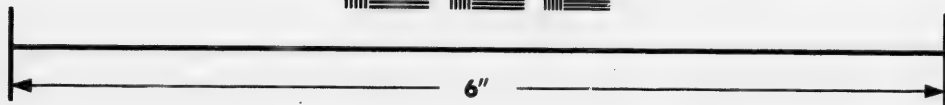
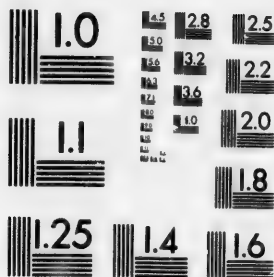


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believe it, and not desire to "glorify Him in their bodies and their spirits, which are His?"* Who can apply it to themselves, and not be warmed into such love for Him as will make His service a delight, and bind them in happy bondage to His will?

Behold, then, beloved, the blessed Jesus comes and pleads with every *worldly and unconverted sinner* in this congregation. He stands beside you, beloved, and pleads with you to forsake your sins and live. He points you to His cross. He bids you look upon the agonies He there endured for you, and entreats you by His bleeding wounds to turn to Him, to renounce the world that crucified Him, to forsake the sins that pierced Him, to give Him the hearts He bought at such a price. Say then, my fellow-sinners, shall He plead with you in vain? Are you determined, for the sake of a few years' vanity, to lie down at last in sorrow, rather than come and be at peace through Him? The Saviour comes not to you now, beloved, armed with the terrors that shall one day surround Him; He comes a loving Saviour, pleading with you by His love for you to come to Him and be saved. O! "how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?"†

Again: the Saviour comes with the message

* 1 Cor. vi. 20.

† Heb. ii. 3.

of His love to every *sin-convicted sinner*, who is cast down beneath the burden of iniquity, and who tremblingly and doubtingly enquires, "What must I do to be saved?" He tells you, that so far as relates to doing anything for your salvation, all is already done. He points you to the atonement which was completed on the cross; He bids you listen to His dying cry, "It is finished;" He urges you simply to believe that the work has been thus accomplished for you; and believing this, to go on your way, rejoicing in His love. And must it be in vain, that the Lord thus assures you of His love, and bids you to trust in His finished work? Is there any such comfort in a doubting frame of mind, anything so cheering in despondency, that ye will still hold on to your doubts, rather than simply trust His love? His mercy is for sinners. The message of the text is for those that have been estranged from Him: the assurance of His pity and His love for those that have been "His enemies by wicked works." Fear not, then, beloved, only believe, and "all things are possible to him that believeth."*

Again: the Saviour comes and stands by the *sick and dying bed*. He takes the sufferer by the hand; He bids him turn the eye of faith to Him; He saith, "Fear not, for I have redeemed

* Mark ix. 23.

thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.* What is it makes thy sick bed gloomy; what is it that plants thorns in thy dying pillow? The thought of unforgiven sin. But "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." How many a time of suffering is filled with gloomy fears, how many a dying hour is worn out in misery and wretchedness, because the sufferer will not simply heed the voice of Jesus, and accept and believe the message of His love! Who need be wretched, that will but take the Lord Jesus at His word; who be afraid to die, that will but turn to Him, who has passed His red and bleeding hand over the sins of all them that believe?

And once more: the loving Saviour comes to the *backsliding professor*, and in His tenderest tone of love pleads with him, to return to Him who has redeemed him. He tells him indeed of his danger; He warns him of the ruin he is bringing upon himself: "O Israel!" He saith, "thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help." "O Israel! return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."† He takes him lovingly by the hand; He points the fingers to His bleeding wounds; He reminds the sinner how, by his returning to the world

* Isa. xliii. 1.

† Hosea xiii. 9; xiv. 1.

and sin, he drives the nails afresh into His tortured frame ; and He pleads with him to " take with him words, and turn to the Lord, saying, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously ; so will we render the calves of our lips."* And are there any such here, with whom He shall thus plead in vain ; any who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and yet have forsaken Him for the vain pleasures of the world again ? Beloved, still He calls you ; still He pleads with you ; " Return unto me," He saith, " for I have redeemed you."

* Hosea xiv. 2.

SERMON XIX.

HE ANSWERED HER NOT A WORD.

ST. MATTHEW XV. 23.

But He answered her not a word.

“ASK and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”* These are the gracious promises, these the solemn assurances, by which He who knew the mind of God, and understood the counsel of the Most High encouraged the needy sinner to pour out his requests before the Lord. And by His actions, no less than by His words, He cheered the trembling in their approaches to the Father, and comforted those in trouble by the confidence with which He inspired them in the never-failing loving-

* Matt. vii 7, 8.

kindness of the Lord. When was there an instance of his casting out any that went to Him, in their distresses, for healing or relief? Where was there a case of sorrow or of suffering that was laid before His feet, on which He did not shed the ray of comfort, or pour the rich consolation of His blessing and His grace? Surely, whatever may have been the object in view, whether it was the pressure of bodily anguish, or the pang of sore bereavement, or the burden of unforgiven sin upon the conscience, that drew the troubled soul to Him, we can scarce find an exception to the truth or the extent of His assurance, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."*

And yet, if even *one* exception can be found; if even one case can be named, in which the needy suppliant has knocked at the door of mercy, and received no answer; there is a self-torturing ingenuity in misery which would lead every tried and troubled soul to think that case was his. If ever blind, or lame, or leprous man cried unto Him in vain, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me; if ever among the multitudes whom the different cities poured forth, at the mention of His coming, to receive a cure, *one* went away unhealed; if ever among the thousands that were ready to faint by the way, *one*

* John vi. 37.

went away unfed, unfilled ; then, surely, would the sin-convinced and sin-burdened soul be ever ready to exclaim, Just such a one am I ; just that one may *I* be, for whom there is no healing, no pardon, and no peace : just that one may I be, for whom the provision of the Gospel supplies no food, no cleansing, no salvation. Woe is me ! for I am undone ; I am guilty, corrupt, unclean ; and if ever a sinner was passed by unsaved, how can I but fear, that I may be just that one ?

The case to which the text refers presents an instance in which the Lord appears, for a time at least, to have turned a deaf ear to the petitions of one who eagerly sought his help. As he was journeying along the coasts of Tyre and Sidon,—which, though not any part of the Holy Land, He seems to have visited, by way of intimation of God's gracious purpose towards the Gentiles,—a woman of that country, a Greek or Gentile, (for the name of Greek was given indiscriminately to the inhabitants of Pagan cities,) a Syrophenician by nation, as St. Mark informs us, came out of those coasts, and cried earnestly after Jesus, as the Son of David, beseeching him to heal her child. Her daughter was vexed with a devil, grievously tormented ; she had heard of the fame of Jesus, that He was one at whose word the devils fled away, and

whose power was not greater than His tenderness and compassion in using it for the benefit of the afflicted; she came, therefore, and presented her case before Him, with all the importunity of genuine distress. Here, then, was an object, just suited, we might suppose, to awaken the sympathies, and engage the help, of the loving and merciful Saviour. But, "He answered her not a word." Still she follows Him with her petition; still she cries earnestly after Him; still she entreats His help. But still He makes as though He heareth not; still He answers her not a word. His disciples interpose, annoyed at the loudness of her cry, and at the crowd which her entreaties were gathering around them: "Send her away, for she crieth after us!" But His reply is more bitter than His silence. Unlike the gentle Jesus on all other occasions, He seems, in this poor woman's case, to be willing to reproach instead of comfort, to give a stone instead of bread. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs." It was thus the haughty Jew distinguished between himself and the nations of the uncircumcised; but can the lowly Saviour adopt, and act upon, a distinction such as this, and spurn this poor woman, as a crouching dog, from before His feet? Oh, what change can have come over His gentle spirit; what cloud

can so have darkened the face that hitherto beamed tenderness and love? Yet, nothing daunted, the poor woman catches at even this reply as affording her some room for hope. "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Be it, then, as thou sayest, I am a dog, unworthy of the children's privilege, unworthy of the Master's love; I would not rob the children of one blessing; but there is a fulness, an abundance in thy grace, which can spare this mercy without a whit diminishing thy store. Give me but one of the crumbs, that fall uncared-for from the children's food; I am content. The purpose which the Lord had in view in His past treatment of her prayer is now fully answered; and commending the greatness of her faith, as the root of the humility, the patience, the perseverance she displayed, He sends her away with a rich blessing, rich even as her heart could wish.

The consideration, then, of her case, of that portion of it particularly which presents to our view the gracious and compassionate Saviour turning away His face from a poor suppliant's request, may suggest to us some useful instruction concerning the NATURE OF PRAYER, the CAUSES WHICH OBSTRUCT, as may sometimes appear, THE RISING OF OUR PRAYERS TO GOD, and

the PURPOSES WHICH A LOVING SAVIOUR HAS IN VIEW, in sometimes hiding His face from the cry of wretchedness and woe. May the Lord in His rich mercy vouchsafe His teaching and His blessing upon our present meditations; may He so bless to our souls the consideration of this portion of His sacred word, that we may, each and all of us, be edified, stablished, and strengthened in the faith, which is unto the saving of the soul!

I. In considering, then, the history of the poor woman in the text, the first question that suggests itself for our improvement of her case, is, WHAT IS PRAYER? What, at least, were the leading features of her prayer, and by which we may judge, whether we really pray or not?

It may be feared, beloved, that with regard to too many of us this question is far from unnecessary; that there are too many, who could give but a sad answer to the enquiry, Whether ye pray or not? It is no answer, that ye come hither, Sabbath after Sabbath, to this house of prayer; for, to say nothing of the careless indifference shown by too many while supposed to be joining in the voice of supplication which is lifted up to God, it is evident that ye may join in the services of the sanctuary, with every appearance of devotion, and yet

never pray at all. It is no answer, that ye kneel down morning and evening in the privacy of your closet, and utter the words of supplication before the Lord; for, though there may be, alas! too many who do not even thus acknowledge that they are dependent creatures, yet still we may draw near with our lips while our hearts are far away,* and may thus never pray at all. Cases like these suggest no difficulty in answering the enquiry, Why the Lord answers not a word? He answers not, because He hears no cry. There is no prayer goes up into His ear; how then can He heed, much less, reply?

In taking the poor Gentile woman of the text, as an example to us of prayer, we perceive in her petitions—

1. *A deep sense of need.* Hers was, indeed, a need of a temporal blessing. Her daughter lay at home grievously vexed by the assaults of a foul spirit, that had been permitted in some mysterious way to take possession of her; and the mother's heart was drawn out in earnestness and affection, on behalf of her darling child. What was there she had to give, which she would not willingly have bestowed for the healing of that beloved one? What was there the whole world could offer to her acceptance, in comparison with her daughter's cure? There

* Isa. xxix. 13.

are many, doubtless, who can say that in a similar case they would have been just as earnest. Amid the sufferings of those dear to them, their hearts are quite as full; beneath the pressure of their own bodily afflictions, they cry out as loudly as any. But O! beloved, shall this be urged as an excuse for our want of interest in our soul's welfare? Did this poor woman cry thus earnestly to Jesus on behalf of a suffering child; do we cry out ourselves under the pressure of bereavement, or the touch of pain; and shall we plead the greater importance of those bodily afflictions, shall we urge the greater value of bodily health, as the reason why so little earnestness is felt in crying to the Lord for the healing or the welfare of our souls? There can, surely, be no real prayer, where the soul is not felt to be above all things precious; where salvation is not felt to be above all things desirable, where sin is not felt to be the greatest burden, and pardon and peace with God the supreme object of desire. Men may come and confess that they are "miserable sinners" with far less interest in the confession, than they throw into any one of their thousand murmurings about the weather or their health; they may utter the cry for mercy to their souls, with far less earnestness than they would apply for relief for a throbbing finger or an aching head; but this, surely, is not prayer. Prayer is

the earnest cry of the convinced sinner, conscious of his lost condition, awake to his soul's danger, crying to the Lord for mercy, entreating only that he may be saved. Beloved! do ye ever pray?

2. That we may have the simplest possible view of prayer, we will remark only one other feature in this Syrophenician woman's case as essential to the idea of prayer; and that is, *a lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. It is not easy to understand the extent of the faith which she displayed in the Divine character of Jesus, when she addressed Him as the Son of David. It is hard to say whether she meant thus to profess her belief in his being the promised Messiah, "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write," the Son of David and yet David's Lord. But whatever may have been her understanding of the full meaning of this expression, she manifested, as is sufficient for our present purpose to remark, a full persuasion in His power and willingness to grant her all that she required. She had heard of Him at least by the name by which she addressed Him; she had heard of Him as one who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed with the devil; as one who would "not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."*

* Isa. xlii. 3.

She believed that it was only needful to spread out her case before Him to ensure His compassion and His help. And can there be any real prayer now, without the same kind of faith in the power and grace of Jesus? It is necessary to the very simplest idea of prayer, that there should be a belief "that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."* And since Christ Jesus has been set forth as the only way, by which any sinner can draw near to God, there can be no real prayer but that which thus lays hold of the mediation of Jesus, and pleads His finished work as the ground of acceptance before God. Conscious of his own lost condition, the awakened sinner looks to Jesus as a Saviour. Encouraged by His word, he comes and casts his soul, with all its sins and all its sorrows, upon Him. He comes; he cries to the Lord Jesus; and trusts to His own gracious assurance, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Beloved, do ye ever pray?

II. Yet, even those who do thus pray to God through Jesus Christ, will sometimes find it to be their case, as it was with the Syrophenician woman, that He answers not a word. Let it be, therefore, our object, in the second place, to

* Heb. xi. 6.

discover some of the CAUSES WHICH MAY SEEM TO INFLUENCE THE LORD, IN LEADING HIM THUS TO HIDE HIS FACE, as it were, from the cries of those that seek Him.

The reasons which seem thus to prevail with the Lord to change, as it were, His gracious character, and to turn a deaf ear to the requests of those that seek Him, appear to be twofold. There are some arising from our own state before Him. There are others which, as in the case of the text, must be referred to the sovereignty of the Lord's dealings with His people.

1. And among the first class of reasons, why the Lord answers not a word to the petitions of His people, may be mentioned, *their having given way to some temptation, and harbored some sin within their hearts.* Beset as he is, on every side, with temptation, the Christian is bound, by a regard for his own safety, as well as by a respect for the continued injunction of his Lord, to be continually on the watch. And yet, alas! there is no one evil, to which he is more liable, than a want of watchfulness. Having found the pardon of his sins through the blood of the Lamb, and peace with God through faith in His dear Son; having enjoyed a sense of God's love, and the blessedness of communion with Him through the Spirit, the believer is tempted to think that his mountain stands strong, and shall

never be removed.* Then, finding for a while, the power of sin subdued, he begins to fancy it is dead ; and forgets his need of watching against that which has ceased, he thinks, to assault him. But the Enemy is watchful, if he is not. He plies him with temptation in its most subtle form ; and ere he is aware of danger, he is ensnared in the toils of some evil temper, some sinful inclination, some unholy desire, which comes between him and the Lord. Perhaps prayer itself has been more or less neglected all this time ; not that the form of it has been laid aside, but the spirit has been too little regarded ; and when temptation assails him in its regained power, he falls but too easily into its snare. Aroused by some call of Providence or some word of grace, to a sense of his backsliding state, he betakes him, as of old, to the Lord in whom He has believed ; but is it strange that his sins have hid the Lord's face from him, that He will not hear ? Dearly beloved, is this the case with any of you, that ye cry, but the Lord heareth not, even unto the Lord, but ye receive no answer ? O let this lead you then to deep searchings of heart. Let it lead you to seek earnestly, whether there be no unsubdued temper, no cherished indulgence, no bosom sin, which has eaten the life out of your

* Psalm xxx. 7.

devotion, and constrained the Lord, in mercy to your souls, to hide his face from you, that so ye may be brought to yourselves.

2. Again, among this class of reasons why the Lord answers not a word to the prayer that is addressed to Him, may be mentioned *a want of entire self-renunciation* on the part of those that come to Him. There are frequently—would that there were more frequently—those who are awakened to a sense of their sinfulness, and to an earnest desire to be at peace with God. They cry then to the Lord for mercy, they plead with Him for salvation; and yet, like the woman in the text, they receive no answer; they have no peace in their consciences, they have no sense of acceptance with God. And why is this? Because, too often there is, mingled with the sinner's cry for mercy, some secret trust in themselves, in their penitence or their prayers, as forming part of the ground of their acceptance with the Lord. There is earnestness, indeed, arising from a deep consciousness of need; but there is some dependence upon this earnestness, as if it formed a ground of confidence before God. There is a trust in Jesus, indeed, as the only source of pardon, salvation, and peace; and yet there is a leaning upon their own sincerity, or earnestness, or repentance, or prayer, as forming, in some measure, a recommendation to the Saviour.

Now this, beloved, may not be. Salvation is all of grace. From first to last, it is all of merest mercy. And it is no wonder the Lord answereth not a word, when He sees His sinful creatures thus secretly leaning upon themselves, instead of casting themselves on Him, entirely, and unreservedly. Is it thus, beloved, with any of you? Are ye cherishing a secret trust in the sincerity of your repentance, your earnestness, your devotion; are ye looking about for some of these things to bring, as it were, in your hands, as a recommendation to the Lord? Ye cannot look for an answer from the Lord in peace until ye cast off this self-trust, and throw yourselves in utter self-renunciation upon the cross and mediation of Christ.

3. Another reason why the Lord answereth not a word may be *the nature of the request presented to Him* and urged upon His attention. Unquestionably the Christian is encouraged to carry every anxiety, and every care, and every sorrow to the Lord, and to pour out his requests before Him in all times of tribulation, as in all times of wealth. And this encouragement is not limited to spiritual trouble, it extends to every species of distress. "In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."* And

* Phil. iv. 6.

still, forasmuch as we know not, in this respect, what to pray for as we ought, it may be that we present a petition, which important and deep as may seem to us the interests involved in the reply, may yet appear to the Lord unsuitable, and even dangerous to our peace. Are we borne down by the hand of sickness; and, shrinking from its touch, do we cry to the Lord for renovated health? It may be, the Lord sees that a state of continued weakness is better for our souls; and what wonder that He answereth not a word. Are we pressed by the hard gripe of poverty; and do we trust that if the Lord would hear our prayer for wealth we should use it to His glory? It may be that the Lord sees otherwise; and He answers not a word. Beloved, is it thus with any of you? Think not that the Lord hears you not, regards you not, because He gives you no reply. A loving parent would not heed his child's request however strongly urged, if to grant it would be to endanger the child's life. It may be in truest love to your souls, that the Lord answers not a word.

III. But again there is another class of reasons why the Lord answers not, or rather appears not to answer, the prayers of them that call upon Him, and these arise simply from the

sovereignty of His dealings with His people. It may be that a believing soul may come through Jesus unto the Father, and under the teaching of the Spirit present a petition according to the Lord's will, and yet the Lord may appear to hide His face and answer not a word.

In the case of the text, then, let us seek for some of the reasons why the Lord thus deals with those that call upon Him, and consider HIS GRACIOUS PURPOSES towards them.

1. And among these, we may notice, first, it may be *to try their faith*. It is most true, indeed, that the Lord knows what is in man, and can tell the depth and power of our faith, without putting it to any such test. But it is equally certain that the Lord ordinarily puts the faith of His people to the trial, as if He were dependent upon the same evidence which we require for proof of the existence of the principle. And who can question, that when the sinner calls upon God and the Lord heareth not, when he cries unto the Lord for peace and the Lord answereth not, that, then, faith is put into the furnace? It is easy to believe that the Lord loves us, when our souls are full of comfort, and "the candle of the Lord shineth upon our head," and our way is compassed about with blessings, and our hearts are rejoicing in the Lord. But when the waves and billows of

temptation dash over our souls, and we cry unto the Lord, but the heavens are black above us, and there is no light ; when our souls are full of trouble, and our lives draw nigh unto hell ; when our sins rise up as a mountain between us and God, and the Enemy draws nigh to us saying, You a child of God, and thus cast down ! Where is now thy God ? when tribulation and affliction cometh upon us, and there is none to help, and we cry in the day-time but He heareth not, and in the night season also we take no rest ; then, to hope still in God, and to trust upon the Rock of our salvation ; to believe that God loves us, and in His good time will manifest Himself unto us ; this, this is faith ; this is to “ walk by faith and not by sight ; ” this is to believe, though all things be against us, and to trust because God is our hope. And surely it is in love to our souls, that the Lord thus tries the faith of His people. It is easy to persuade ourselves that we are believers when there are no trials in the way. Do we believe Him, do we trust Him still, though He answer us not a word ?

2. Another purpose which the Lord seems to have in thus dealing with His people is *to test their humility*. We perceive how this effect was answered in the case of the Syrophenician woman. How many a haughty soul would have gone

away offended at being thus compared to a dog. But she was willing to accept his mercy on His own terms, if only He would have mercy on her at all. And it may be feared that there are many who knock at the door of the Lord's mercy rather as if they were condescending to the Lord, than as needy suppliants for the merest grace. Too many, like the Pharisees, cannot bear the idea of being saved on the same terms with the publicans and sinners. Too many, though they acknowledge themselves sinners, yet like not to be classed with the mere objects of our race, as equally in need of mercy with the vilest of them all, as only to be saved of as free grace as the very outcast of mankind. Yet surely, while this spirit remains, the soul is yet unhumbled before God. The prayer which the Lord hears is that of him who smites upon his breast, and saith, "God be merciful to me a sinner."* Is the believer, he who has found pardon and peace with God, tempted at any time to forget this? Surely, then, it is in love to his soul that the Lord hides His face from him for a moment, that He may bring him down again, and compel him to cry again for mercy, even as the chief of sinners.

3. And once more, the Lord's purpose may be *to try the perseverance of His people in prayer.*

* Luke xviii. 13.

Too many, it may be feared, pray as if they looked not, cared not, for an answer. They confess that they are sinners, they cry for mercy to their sins ; and go their way and straightway forget what manner of persons they have confessed themselves to be. But "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."* And "the trying of faith worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope."† It is for perfecting these graces in the soul that the Lord sometimes withholds the light of His countenance. If there be a real consciousness of sin, if there be a real faith in Jesus, and longing for His salvation, the soul will not readily be discouraged in waiting upon Him. But if the profession be insincere, if the heart be not in the matter, if the soul be not truly convinced of sin, nor in earnest in seeking for salvation, it will soon weary of crying after One who makes as though He heard not, of waiting upon One who answereth not a word. Surely then it is in love to the souls of His people that the Lord thus tries their patience in waiting upon Him. It is to humble them, and to prove them, and to know what is in their hearts, whether they truly desire the mercy of the Lord or no !

Dearly beloved, are there not those among

* Lam. iii. 26.

† Jas. i. 3 ; Rom. v. 4.

you, who never pray at all? To you it may be feared our present subject is one of little interest. Ye know not the trials of those to whom the Lord answers not a word, for ye present no petitions, ye look for no reply. Yet however trying may be the state of those with whom the Lord deals as with the poor woman in the text, how much more are ye to be pitied, who "care for none of these things!" Oh, may the Lord awaken you from this Gal'io-like spirit, ere the days come upon you, when ye shall call and there will be none to answer; and it shall be too late to cry for mercy, when the time shall have come for judgment.

Are there not those among you, beloved, who go through the form of prayer, but have never bent as humble sinners before the throne of mercy, nor cried, out of the bitterness of a bruised spirit, for pardon and for peace? To you too, it may be feared, the idea of looking for, waiting for, an answer to your prayers, will seem fanciful and absurd. And yet, beloved, the salvation of your souls is not a thing of form. As sinners, ye are in need of mercy; as polluted, ye are in need of cleansing; as perishing souls, ye are in need of life. And how will it be with you when the Lord shall enter into judgment with you, if ye have never really cried for mercy, nor sought, in heartfelt prayer, the pardon of your

sins, through the blood of Jesus? Better that ye should know now the hidings of the Lord's face, if He were thus preparing you to enjoy His presence, than that ye should go on unconscious of your need of Him, and lie down in those regions of despair, where no ray of His presence lights up the darkness of the lost.

Are there those of you, beloved, that are mourning the hidings of the Lord's face? who cry to Him but He heareth not; who call upon Him but He answereth not a word? Dearly beloved, let this lead you to deep searchings of heart. Search well and look whether it be any secret sin that hath hid His face from you, that He will not hear.* And let the example of this poor Gentile woman encourage you to follow on. Let your souls follow hard after the Lord; let your motto be that of the warriors of Gideon, Faint, yet pursuing.† And "though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations," yet "the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."‡

* Isa. lix. 2.

† Judges viii. 4.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

SERMON XX.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

MATTHEW xx. 6, 7.

*And about the eleventh} hour he went out, and
found others standing idle, and saith unto them,
Why stand ye here all the day idle? They
say unto him, Because no man hath hired us.
He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vine-
yard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye
receive.*

THE leading doctrine, which our Lord intended to inculcate by the parable of which the text forms a part, seems contained in the enquiry with which the great householder reproved the murmurings of the discontented laborers: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" The great truth here implied, is one which runs through the whole volume of the Word of God, and is in many passages, par-

ticularly of the New Testament, stated in explicit terms ; namely, that in the dealings of God with the souls of men, all is of free and sovereign grace, all "according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."* There is, alas ! no truth in the blessed Book, which, though we should suppose it almost self-evident, is so much resisted by the mind of unregenerate man, or which awakens such enmity in the hearts of those whose high thoughts have not been brought "into captivity to the obedience of Christ." There is something so humbling to the pride of man's heart in the idea of his being not only unable by any doings of his own to deserve the favor of the Lord, but indebted to the purest grace for every mercy shown him, for every blessing vouchsafed to him, for the very power to think, the will to choose, the grace to do any one thing that is good ; — there is in all this something so humbling, that the soul untaught, unsanctified by the Spirit of the Lord, can by no means receive it. And yet, so necessary is it to the due exaltation of the Saviour, that, as the work of saving souls is solely His, unshared by angel or by man, so the choice of the saved, the gift of the grace needed for their salvation, the award of eternal life at last to all that believe in Him,

* Eph. i. 11.

should be solely according to the good pleasure of His will. So important is this truth, so essential to the glory of God in the work of man's salvation, that we have no need to wonder at its being continually insisted upon as the rule of His dealings with His creatures.

In filling up the lines, however, of a picture whose great object it is to set forth in striking prominence the momentous doctrine here adverted to, we perceive other important topics, connected with the scheme of man's salvation, brought out to view. And among these, few are of a more awakening, a more touching, a more affecting nature, than those contained in the portion selected as our present subject. The gracious call addressed, even at the eleventh hour, to those who had not yet entered into the vineyard; the solemn thought of their having been all the day idle, when the Lord had so much work for them to do, and this because no man had hired them; the gracious rule by which it is promised that their few and late labors shall be recompensed at the great day of reckoning; these are topics worthy of our most serious attention, bearing upon our most important interests, interwoven with the most momentous considerations affecting our soul's salvation. It may therefore be well, beloved, if the Lord shall vouchsafe to bless us, that we

make these topics the subject of our present meditation. Oh ! let us, then, entreat that blessing ; let us pray the Lord to vouchsafe His presence and His teaching ; let us place ourselves at His feet, to hear what He will say unto us, and hearken to the lessons of that blessed Word which maketh wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us first devote a brief attention to the general scope and bearing of the parable, and then proceed to the more particular examination of the portion now before us.

At the close of the previous chapter, after inculcating the solemn lesson, drawn from the case of the rich young man, concerning the difficulties which impede the reception of the Gospel message by the rich ; and after assuring His disciples of the gracious recompense with which their devotion to Him should be rewarded, at the resurrection of the just ; our Lord announces the important truth, that "many who are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."* Many, that is, who have had every advantage of talent, of education, of situation in life—many, who have been surrounded from their earliest youth with the ministry and means of grace, shall be found to have profited little, if at all, by their many privileges, and shall even be cast out

* Matt. xix. 30.

as unprofitable servants ; while many, on the other hand, who have been destitute of all these advantages, who have been lowest on the scale of intellectual endowment, and least in the estimation of the world on the score of station, influence, or education, shall yet so eagerly embrace the message of a Saviour's love, and so unreservedly give themselves up to Him, that they shall be first among the Lord's people, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. For this "kingdom of heaven," our Saviour proceeds to say (meaning evidently, in this passage, the kingdom of His grace here, as the introduction to, and preparation for, the kingdom of His glory hereafter), "is like unto a householder, hiring laborers into his vineyard." He went out early in the morning, and engaged those whom he then found in the market-place, at the stipulated wages of a Roman penny a-day. His bargain with them was express ; they engaged to labor for a certain sum ; and whatever others might receive, they were entitled to no more. Again, at later periods of the day, he went out ; at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and even at the eleventh hour, and sent into the vineyard all whom he found in the market-place waiting for employment, promising to give them for their labor, not any stipulated sum, but whatever he might think right. When the time of reckoning

arrived, and the laborers were assembled to receive their hire, the last that had been engaged received the full amount which had been agreed on with the first. When the turn therefore of these came, and the wages they had bargained for were tendered them, they murmured against the lord of the vineyard, as though the favor shown to others had increased the merit of their work. Their conduct then called forth the indignant reproof of the master in whose service they had been engaged, and the assertion of his right to give to the last and lowest laborer in his vineyard just as much as he had agreed to give to them. In this, as in many other of our Lord's parables, there are various circumstances introduced which are merely for preserving, as it were, the keeping of the picture, and are not to be considered as inculcating any truth. It is the leading scope and aim of the parable, which should alone be dwelt upon. In the present case our Lord is supposed to refer primarily to the case of the Jews and Gentiles. The leaders of the Jews in our Lord's day were indignant above measure at every hint which was given of an intention to admit the Gentiles to equal privileges with those which they, the chosen people of the Lord, had so long exclusively enjoyed. Trusting, as the Jews did, to their descent from Abraham as

giving them a sufficient claim to all the blessings of the covenant made with him and with his seed, and regarding their long possession of the worship of the true God in the light of a title to His continued favor, instead of an obligation to peculiar devotedness, they were jealous of every intimation of the Lord's purposes of mercy towards the benighted Gentiles. But the Lord would have them to know, that the darkness and ignorance in which the Heathen world had been permitted to lie, and the long exclusion from the worship and service of the true God, to which, in His sovereign purpose, they had been doomed, should not operate any longer as a bar to their admission to all the blessings of the covenant; and that, on the contrary, the eagerness with which they should accept the message of salvation, whenever it was announced to them, the readiness with which they should obey the call, whenever it should reach them, the joy with which they should glory in the light which the rising of the Day Star upon their benighted lands should shed around them, were intimations of the Lord's purposes of grace towards them, and pledges of His loving design to bring them, of His own good pleasure, to all the glory and the joy laid up as the inheritance of His people.

This lesson, however, instructive as it is in itself, and frequently as it formed the subject of

our Lord's parables, by which He taught the people, does not seem to me to be the special purport of the one now before us. Our Lord's instructions were always not only pre-eminently excellent in themselves, but also peculiarly appropriate to the circumstances which seemed to call them forth. Now He was not, in the present case, surrounded by the haughty chief priests and rulers of the people, nor by the self-righteous and cavilling Pharisees; but was instructing His own disciples in the peculiarities of His kingdom. He had given them a gracious intimation of His purpose to bestow upon them the richest of its honors, just after they had seen one, who had been favored with every advantage of birth, of education, of religious privilege, turned away by his lurking love of the world, from the service of the self-denying and lowly Saviour. He taught them, that this difference in their favor resulted not from any superiority in their natural disposition, nor any greater claim they had in any respect upon the loving kindness of the Lord; but that it arose simply from the free grace of Him, who "will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion."* The day, then, which forms the period of the transactions of the parable, is the day of grace, under whatever

* Rom. ix. 15.

dispensation, at whatever era of the world; while the different hours of the day represent to us the different amount of religious privileges which different individuals at all times have enjoyed; and the nature of the reckoning sets forth to us that as it is entirely of grace that any soul is, at any time, led to renounce his sins, to take up the cross and follow Jesus, so eternal life at last shall be the free gift of God, according to His own good pleasure, to those to whom it has been "given to believe" in Christ.

In this view of it, then, the lesson which the parable is intended to inculcate is just as applicable to our own, as to any other, day, in which there are sinners to be invited to the Saviour, or souls to be saved through His blood. And we may thus proceed to consider that portion of it which the text contains, in its bearing upon our own day of grace, in its reference to the privileges of our own vocation, in its illustration of the gracious nature of the Lord's dealings with those who give themselves up to Him.

Let your present attention then, dearly beloved, be engaged in considering, first, THE ENQUIRY addressed to those who were found unemployed even at the eleventh hour: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" secondly, THE EXCUSE: "Because no man hath hired us;" and

thirdly, THE ENGAGEMENT : “ Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatever is right, that shall ye receive.” And let us pray the continued presence and blessing of the Lord upon these considerations.

I. And, in the first place, THE ENQUIRY addressed by the householder to the laborers standing in the market-place is one which might well be addressed to multitudes in nominally Christian congregations : Why stand ye here all the day idle ?

If it was the dying lamentation of one,* who had labored much in the cause of Christian truth, but who felt at last how vain were all his labors in comparison with the faith of the most illiterate peasant : Alas ! I have wasted life in taking great pains to do nothing !—what might well be the confession of multitudes of nominal Christians, with regard to the service in which their lives are spent ! How many are there, who having received the talent of *time* to be employed for God (even if no other), could give no better account of it now than this : Here it is, Lord, laid up in a napkin, and hidden in the earth. There may be much hurrying hither and thither about the business of the world ; much “ rising early, and late taking rest, and

* Grotius.

eating the bread of carefulness," in providing for the wants of this frail body, and laying up treasure in the storehouses of earth; there may be much of the most wearying of all pursuits, a devotion to the gaieties and pleasures of the world; but where is the surrender of the heart to the service and the love of Jesus, where is the zeal for the honor of Christ, where is the daily taking up of His Cross, where the steady and consistent evidence of a life of godliness that the soul is truly alive to God? Many there are indeed, who, if remonstrated with on their want of love for Christ and devotion to His service, with the enquiry of the text, *Why stand ye all the day idle?* would stare in amazement at the question. Idle, they would say, why stand I idle? No! It is because I am so busy, that I have so little time, so little power, to attend to my soul's concerns. Scarcely have I a moment I can call my own. The cares of the world, the anxieties of my profession, the difficulties of the times so entirely engross me, that I am compelled to neglect the service of God, and to postpone the care of my soul to a more convenient season. And are not they then bartering their souls for the things of this life? Is it not to them that the question of the Lord applies with awful force, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose

his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

It is well that we should bear in mind that in those parables where our Lord sets forth to us the future condemnation of the lost, He describes them, not as having been marked by any peculiar features of ungodliness, but simply as having been "unprofitable" servants. In the parable of the talents,† it is he who could give no better account of himself, and against whom no worse charge is brought, than that he had buried his talent in the earth, whose condemnation is to outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus,‡ there is no other charge mentioned against the unhappy Dives, who lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments, than that he had been clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. He had been a selfish, sensual man; he had lived to himself; he had not been "rich towards God." In the parable of the ten virgins,§ the five who were foolish even made a profession of religion; but they were not watching for their Lord, they were not ready with their lamps trimmed for His coming; and the door was shut against them for ever. And *he* is standing idle, who,

* Mark viii. 36, 37.

† Luke xvi. 19—31.

† Matt. xv. 14—30.

§ Matt. xxv. 1—13.

however he may be engrossed by the cares and business of the world, however pressed he may be by the hurry and bustle of life, is unprofitable towards God, has never really given his heart to Christ, and taken up his cross to follow Him. Why then, Oh, why? we would ask the men of this world, the slaves of business, the servants of pleasure, why stand ye all the day idle? The business of your soul's salvation is yet unattended to; the service which the Lord demands of you is yet unpaid; and your day is wearing away; which of you can say whether even its eleventh hour is not now rolling over you? Why will ye trifle with its fleeting moments? Oh, why stand ye all the day idle?

II. Can ye offer THE EXCUSE, which the laborers in the parable had to urge in their behalf in reply to the enquiry of the householder, "No man hath hired us?"

This excuse, with which, alas! in its literal meaning our ears are but too familiar at this season among our own laboring people, appears to refer, in its spiritual meaning, to the calls which the Lord addresses to the hearts and consciences of sinners, urging on them to take up the cross of Christ, to forsake their sins, and give themselves to God.

And can any urge the plea of the laborers in

the text, when remonstrated with about their soul's salvation, who are surrounded as ye are, beloved, by *the mercies and loving kindness* of the Lord? Who is there among you, beloved, that can look back upon the way which the Lord our God hath led you in the wilderness, that can compare his present circumstances with what he might reasonably have looked for at the Lord's hands, and not be constrained to say, Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life! And does not such confession then involve an earnest call from God, a claim from Him upon the devotion of your hearts to Him who hath dealt so lovingly with you?

And can any say, No man hath hired us, who have sat, as ye have, beneath the *ministrations of the Gospel*, have heard from Sabbath to Sabbath the word of Salvation, been urged by the terrors of the law, been appealed to by the invitations of His love, been called by the preaching of a crucified Saviour, been charged, as ye love your souls for which He died, to give yourselves to God and live? Surely, there was a voice of mercy in the call, Except ye repent, ye perish. Surely, there was a voice of love in the invitation, Come unto me, and I will give you rest. Surely, there is tenderness, yet power, in the appeal, Look unto me, and be saved! And can these things have sounded in your ears, and yet

have involved you in no responsibility; yet have you the plea to urge, No man hath hired us!

And can any urge this plea, who have been appealed to, as the most, may I not say all of you, at some period or other have been, by the *afflictive dispensations* of the Lord's providence? Who is there among you, that hath never been bowed down by the touch of sickness, or racked by the throb of pain? Who is there among you, that hath never been startled by some fatal accident, awed by some sudden death? Who is there among you, that hath never been called to mourn some dying relative, to weep beside the bier where lay some cherished dear one? And have these things passed by, and left no call behind them to give heed to your souls' concerns; have these things appealed to you, and still left you the excuse, No man hath hired us!

Or can any urge this plea, who have been striven with, as ye have been, by the *monitions of conscience*? May I not confidently ask, whether there be one among you, who has not thus been striven with? What! have mercies from the Lord's hand surrounded you all your days, and never awakened the enquiry, How am I serving Him, who has done so much for me? Hath the message of salvation been again and again sounded in your ears, and never aroused

the self-enquiry, Am I at peace with God? am I washed in the blood of Jesus? Am I fit for heaven? Have the warnings of God's providence fallen thick around you, and never made you ask: Suppose it should be my turn next; am I prepared to meet my God? Surely, the heart must be hard as the nether mill-stone, that hath never been stirred by such thoughts as these; and who that hath had a monitor within to sound the note of warning in his soul, can say: No man hath hired us!

III. Proceed we, however, to notice, in the third place, THE ENGAGEMENT which the Lord makes with those who had been thus unemployed; "Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." There are several important topics, which suggest themselves under this head, and to some of these let me now entreat your attention.

1. And, first, it is worthy of remark, that it was at the *eleventh* hour, not at the twelfth, that the last offer was made to the laborers who had been standing idle. For as the day had waned, there was yet a portion of it left in which work might be performed. Though the day was nearly gone, there was still one hour in which those who then received the call might glorify the Lord that called them. Whatever

encouragement, then, men may attempt to draw from some passages in the word of God for delaying repentance to a dying hour, there is no such encouragement to be drawn from the parable now before us. It is not when life is ebbing fast away, when the sight has become dim to the gaudy color of earth's vanities, when the creeping step of death hath chilled the heart's love for the follies by which it had been engrossed, and the pleasures of this life have lost their sweetness only because the senses have begun to fail; it is not *then* that the call of the text is addressed to the sinner's soul, Go ye also into the vineyard. No! whatever hope the messages of God's mercy may whisper to the mourner's ear in the case of those who even at the last moment have turned the eye of faith to Jesus, there is not one word in the blessed book which encourages a sinner to delay his own soul's concerns to the uncertain moment of a dying bed. And yet, how many speak of the eleventh hour, as though it meant but the few last struggles of expiring life; as though the sinner had yet time to seek for mercy, when the call is even now upon his ear: Prepare to meet thy God! Oh! which of you can say, whether even his eleventh hour is not nearly gone, and hath but a few sands to run, before the time of reckoning shall arrive?

2. For, secondly, we perceive that in the case of the laborers in the text, the *eleventh hour*, late as it was in the day, was the *first* at which the invitation to labor in the vineyard had sounded in their ears. They could say with truth, No man hath hired us; and as soon as the engagement offered they closed readily with its terms. This we may observe, also, concerning the case even of the dying thief. He had seen nothing of Jesus before he met Him as a scorn of men and the outcast of the people, condemned like himself to an ignominious and accursed death. But even then, in circumstances so little favorable to the encouragement of faith in Jesus, on the first occasion on which the Saviour was held up before his view, he looked to Him and lived. Who then that from his infancy hath been nurtured up beneath the ministry of gospel salvation, who that from day to day, from year to year, hath had the voices of the Lord's providence and grace urging him to fly to Christ, and hath gone on in carelessness and sin, can draw encouragement from cases such as these to put off to a dying moment the vast, the awful matters, of his soul's concerns? Nay, beloved, surely the call of the text is rather a solemn appeal to you to come at once to Christ. It may be that the last message of the Lord's mercy is now sounding in the ears of some,—

of which?—of you. It may be that your day of grace is nearly closed; O! seize the fleeting hour on its flight! “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!”*

3. Yet again, we observe, with regard to those who even at the eleventh hour close with the offers of God’s mercy in Christ Jesus, there is a *reward promised of mere grace*, not of works, but of Him that called them. “Whatsoever is right,” said the householder to the waiting laborers, “that shall ye receive.” The recompence they did receive was one of pure favor, not what they had earned. And so, while on the one hand we are told that sin receives only what it has earned in being punished with death, eternal life is on the other hand the free gift of God to all them that believe. St. Paul, in looking forward to the crown of righteousness, anticipated it only as the gift of God; and that not a gift reserved for him because of his labors in the Church of Christ, but prepared for “all them also that love His appearing.”† If we regard eternal life as a recompence, of *what* is it the reward? Of what we shall have done for God? No! but of what He has done for us! It will be but the recompence of His own grace, the reward of His own mercy vouchsafed

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

† 2 Tim. iv. 8.

to our souls. It is the Lord's own grace that at last makes the call effectual to those that believe. It is God himself, that by His Spirit worketh all their works in His people that serve Him. Since then God's is all the work, surely it is of His merest mercy that He brings any child of grace to glory. Oh! who is there that knoweth anything of himself as a sinner and of Jesus as a Saviour, that will not be ready even now, amid all the weakness of the flesh, to ascribe every particle of his salvation to the free grace and mercy of the Lord; and at the last, amid the glories of the kingdom, to cast his crown at the Redeemer's feet, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord!" Thine is all the work: to Thee be all the glory! Oh! are there any here, that after years of carelessness and sin, struggling against conscience, resisting God's Spirit, rejecting His word, have been brought low by some message of His love, and had grace given them to take up their cross and follow Christ? Let them take encouragement, from His word, to go on unto the end. "Whatsoever is right," He saith, "that shall ye receive." It is right, we cannot doubt, that they should receive whatever He has promised. And His promise is this: "Verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife,

or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."*

* Luke xviii. 29, 30.

SERMON XXI.

YET THERE IS ROOM.

LUKE XIV. 22.

*And yet there is room.**

FEW parables of our blessed Saviour are more comprehensive in the view they present to us of the whole Gospel scheme, than this of the marriage feast. It sets before us at once the free and sovereign mercy of the Lord, from which proceeds the invitation to come and feast upon the bounties of His grace. It reveals to us the great suitableness of the Gospel as a message of peace and love to the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, the spiritually diseased, the helpless, the corrupt ; and shows us that while “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the

* Preached in 1838, and now inserted by request.

wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are."* The latter part of the parable, that from which the words of the text are taken, appears peculiarly full of comfort and encouragement to poor lost perishing sinners. When they who first were bidden refused to come, and went their way one to his farm, another to his merchandise, the master of the house said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the maimed, and the halt and the blind. And the servant said, "Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." The servant had gathered all that he could find, he had assembled together all the poor creatures he had met with in the streets, and yet there was room. And is it not so with the offers of the Gospel? Is there not yet room for all that will but heed the call, and come? Is there not yet room for all the poor sinners of the present generation, for all that shall have their being upon the earth to the latest time? O yes! dear brethren, there still is room. Still do the servants of the great Householder return to their Lord and say, "And yet there is room;" Thy

* 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

message of salvation has been proclaimed ; Thy invitations of free grace been given ; and some have attended to the invitation ; some have believed the report ; but yet there is room. Still do the servants of the Householder bring back the same message from the Lord to their fellow-sinners, " Yet there is room." The invitation of the Lord is still held out to you ; His call is still addressed to you ; your day of grace still shines ; the door is still open ; yet there is room. When there is no more room, the door will be shut ; the trumpet will sound, and the Lord shall come in to see the guests. But the door still stands open, and while it is so, no poor sinner, no wanderer in the highways and hedges of a weary world, need fear but that there is room for him ; he need only come upon the invitation he has received, and be welcome to the blessed fellowship of those that shall, ere long, sit down with Jesus in His heavenly kingdom. Dear brethren, upon the graciousness of this assurance we would desire to dwell a little ; in the humble hope that your souls may be quickened by the contemplation, and by the thought, How rich in mercy, how plenteous in redemption, how free in the invitations of His grace, how rich in the stores of precious things provided for those that come, the Lord our strength is ! May the Lord God the Holy

Ghost be present, to sanctify our considerations of the subject; and so exhibit to our souls the riches of God's mercy in Christ Jesus, that the heart of every poor sinner here may be drawn out in ardent longings for an interest in Him who is so gracious and so good, so faithful and so strong, in behalf of all that trust in Him!

Let us then, dear brethren, having heard that yet there is room, enquire WHERE THERE IS ROOM, AND FOR WHOM?

I. And in answer to the first question, WHERE THERE IS ROOM? we shall find that—

1. There is, in the first place, room *in the heart of God*. Though "God is a Spirit, without body, parts, or passions," as our Article expresses it, yet in His tender condescension to our limited capacities, He has been pleased to describe Himself to us figuratively in terms drawn from our own nature. Thus we speak of the arm of God as stretched out in protection of His people, and in vengeance against His foes. Thus we speak of the hand of God as pouring out blessings upon the children of men, and laying the rod of fatherly chastisement upon those whom He loves. And thus we speak of the heart of the Lord as the seat of those affections and feelings in the character of the invisible God which, in their different degree, have their

habitation in the heart of man. Now the heart is the seat of the affections, the abode of love and tenderness, in those persons in whom these feelings are found. Love is not a notion of the head, an effort of the understanding, a principle of the mind; but it is an affection of the heart. In saying, then, that there is still room in the heart of God, we would assure you that His love is not exhausted, that His tenderness, His affection, is still waiting for objects on which to exercise itself. We speak not—for we have but little to guide us—of the manner in which, and of the length of time for which, the love of the Almighty Lord of all has been displayed in those countless bright and glorious worlds that hold their course in the heavens above. But we know with regard to ourselves, that for nearly 6,000 years has the love of God been exhibiting itself in every variety of form among the inhabitants of our earth. For that length of period hath an unceasing succession of mercies and of visitations, all equally displaying the tenderness of God, continued to manifest the loving kindness of His providence, and shown the gracious feelings of His heart, toward the creatures of His hand. But hath His love contented itself with such displays as these? Oh no! He hath not merely showered good things upon His creatures, and been content to leave them to

enjoy these good things for a season, and then to lie down in sorrow beneath the vengeance which he could not withhold from their sins. His heart hath yearned for their *eternal* welfare. He hath longed to bestow upon them a full measure of his own happiness and glory, and to bring them to the full enjoyment of that favor which "is better than life itself." The sin of man, his obstinate rebellion, and perverseness in transgression stood in the way. The Lord had denounced vengeance against sin; He had threatened death against transgression; and consistently with His own holiness and truth, He could not let one sinner escape the vengeance due to sin. But His love had from all eternity devised a plan by which this impediment should be removed. His graciousness prompted the surrender of what was dearest to His heart, His own, His well-beloved Son, that *He* might suffer the vengeance which was due to the sin of man. That love has been displayed. These motions of Almighty love have been accomplished in the agonies of Gethsemane, and the tortures in which the Son of man expired upon Calvary. Thus was man's sin atoned for, and by the same amazing agonies was purchased for our rebel race the gift of God's Holy Spirit, to turn the hearts, to purify and sanctify the souls, of those who, without His gracious influence, must have

gone on still in ignorance and sin. And although the love of God hath thus been shown, although it has been displayed in such wondrous ways, still it is not exhausted. All the gifts indeed which are necessary to make man happy have been thus provided for his acceptance; but God's love is still manifested in His long suffering and patience, in the manner in which He waits for sinners to come and be reconciled to Him. Surely any love but His would long since have been exhausted by witnessing the manner in which so many treat the offers of that love. Surely any love but that of God would have been long since worn out by the carelessness and thoughtlessness of many, the self-satisfied neglect of many more, the profligacy and sin with which many more still, cast back the offers of His love. But His love is not exhausted, His tenderness is not worn out, His heart is not yet closed. Even "yet there is room." Yes, in the heart of the loving Lord, there is room still. The number of His people is not yet made up; else would the world soon come to an end. The overflowings of His love have not yet filled all the vessels that are designed for the Master's use in His kingdom above. Dear brethren, *in the heart of God*, believe it, "*there yet is room.*"

2. But there is room is the second place, *in*

the fountain of Jesus' blood. There was, in former times, at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool named Bethesda, having five porches; and indeed recent travellers assert that the remains of those porches, or of some of them at least, are still to be discovered there. Its name Beth-esda, or the *house of mercy*, was given to it because of some miraculous virtue in the waters of the pool, which was every now and then imparted to them by the descent of an angel, and which conveyed health to the body of that one among the poor sick multitude lying in the porches, awaiting the angel's coming, who first, after the troubling of the waters, stepped in. Yes, the first one that was put into the pool was healed, but there was no room for more. The basin of the pool indeed was large enough; there was space enough in it for fifty to have bathed; but as regarded any healing virtue it could impart, there was only room for one. One only could receive a cure at a time; and that only once in a while. Was it the gracious design of the Lord in maintaining such a miracle, which ceased after the Lord Jesus had paid His visit to Bethesda, to magnify by the contrast the rich abundance of that precious stream which is ever sufficient, and always open, to wash away the sins, and heal the soul's disease of every sinner that applies? Behold,

there is "a fountain opened" in the house of David; it is "opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem;"—that is, it is opened alike for the Queen and for her subjects; for the royal family and for the beggars' children; for the nobleman and for the peasant; for the rich and for the poor; for the soldier and for the citizen; for the seaman and for the landsman; for parent and child, husband and wife, master and servant; it is open to all—"for sin and for uncleanness."* One and another, from the highest to the lowest, from the richest to the poorest, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"† but, as "there is no difference" in this matter, so neither is there any respect of persons as regards the abundant sufficiency of the fountain that has been opened to wash their sins away. The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; and there he washed away the guilt and the pollution of his sinful soul. The depth of his iniquity was not so deep as the fountain of the blood of Jesus; the corruption of his soul was not so black, but that the stream from Jesus' heart could wash him white as snow. In that same fountain, have all those been washed that from the time of Adam's fall to this present hour have been placed by faith amid the Lord's

* Zech. xiii. 1.

† Rom. iii. 23.

redeemed. All that with sinful and polluted souls have come to this fountain to be washed, have found it sufficient for their cleansing. All the diseased and dying sinners that have come to this precious fountain for recovery, have found it a well of water springing up in them to everlasting life. All that, at the present moment, over the whole surface of the globe, are washing by faith in that healing stream, are now experiencing its virtues, and find it a stream to cleanse and wash their guilt away; and all the Lord's people that are now upon the earth, that have as yet been called and justified, are washing continually in that stream. And yet, *there is room*. The space is not yet occupied; its virtues not exhausted. The blood of Jesus has the same power now as when it trickled fresh beneath the thorny crown, to cleanse from all iniquity; the stream that gushed from His side was an infinite stream, capable of filling all space, and of extending its virtues as far as the stars of heaven roll in their courses, to as many as would be reckoned by the sands on the sea shore. It hath not lost one particle of its virtue; and is yet as free of access, as if not one had come. Dear brethren, the blood of Jesus hath washed away the guilt of thousands, yea, of millions of our race; but it can wash

the guilt away of a thousand times as many more. Yet, then, there is room for you. The stream that flows from Jesus hath satisfied the thirst of millions of needy, fainting, sinners; and it is sufficient to satisfy the wants of as many millions more. Yet, then, dear brethren, there is room for you. The sun that shines on you hath shone upon all the millions that have walked upon the earth; but its beams are as bright as ever, its light and heat as abundantly imparted to you as to the first man that saw and felt it. The boundless ocean hath floated a thousand waves in its day, and is now traversed from end to end by countless ships; and yet we might cross it to our father-land, and not discover that there was one vessel but our own upon its waste of waters. Such is the fountain, nay, the ocean of the blood of Jesus. Thousands have sailed through it to heaven. Thousands are now under the Lord's pilotage pursuing their voyage thither. And yet there is as much room for us to follow by the same way to heaven, as if there were none beside ourselves on a voyage to a heavenly home. Thousands, too, have been gladdened in their voyage, and found their vigor and their health by the beams of the Sun of Righteousness; and yet there is as much warmth and light, and life, and healing, in His

wings for you and me as for the first of Adam's race that was saved from Adam's sin. Oh, yes, dear brethren, even yet, *there is room*.

3. And, thirdly, as there is room in the blood of Jesus for your salvation here, so is there yet room *in heaven* to receive you hereafter. In that vision in which the beloved Apostle of our Lord was permitted to gaze upon things that shall be hereafter, he saw "a great multitude which no man could number," out of every nation under heaven. This multitude was made up of the Lord's children, of those that had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* And though this countless multitude were there, yet was there room still. There was room for the Apostle to stand and gaze with wonder upon the throng of the redeemed. Yea, he saw there room enough, not only for those that had thus been gathered out of all the world, but room enough for all the inhabitants of the world itself. If the whole world are not admitted, then, it will not be for lack of room to admit them, if they would but apply for admission. Shall the Gospel be preached to every creature in all the world, and shall there not be room in heaven for every creature to enjoy the promise of the Gospel, if they will but heed the message and receive it into their hearts? Oh,

* Rev. vii. 9—14.

yes! *yet there is room.* Many that while on earth were sheltered in Jesus, have, long ere this, been landed on the heavenly shore. Thousands that have profited by the Lord's message in their state of trial, and have received and fed upon the manna of His Word, have, long ere this, arrived at the heavenly Canaan, and exchanged the manna of this wilderness for the bread of everlasting life. Yea, millions that by faith have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are, long ere this, before the throne of God, and serving Him day and night in His temple; and daily is their number added to. And *yet there is room.* "In my father's house," saith the Lord Jesus to the twelve, and through them to all that should believe on Him through their word, "In my Father's house are many mansions;"* yea, as many as there are souls to be saved. The Lord has gone thither to prepare a place for His people, and until He comes again He will still be preparing for them. Yet, then, there is room. Dear brethren! the time is short. The Lord is at hand, even at the doors; but so long as He withholds His step, there yet is room. It may be, that it is only for a moment; but, for the moment, there is room! Yes! Oh, fly then to the door: it is not yet shut: *there yet is room.*

* John xiv. 2.

II. There is room yet. But FOR WHOM? Is there any poor sinner here that asks, Is there room for *me*? Is there any poor sinner that shuts the door against himself, and says, There is *no* room for *me*? Let us ask, then, again, FOR WHOM IS THERE ROOM?

1. There is room and welcome, in the first place, for *every poor sinner that feels his ungodliness*, that mourns his sin, that earnestly asks, What must I do to be saved? Yes! there is room and welcome for every poor sinner, that is but made willing by the Lord's grace to forsake his sins, and be saved. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," is the gracious invitation still addressed to you; "come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."* "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."† Dear brethren! do ye feel sin a burden; do ye faint under it; and long to be free from it? Come! there is room for you and welcome, in His redemption, upon whom your burden has been laid. Do ye find that after all your draughts of worldly comfort, ye still thirst; and do ye long for that well-spring, that floweth to everlasting life? There is room for you, and welcome, at that stream, of which

* Isa. lv. 1.

† Rev. xxii. 17.

whosoever drinketh shall never thirst. Have ye been given up in a complete slavery to the world's customs, and pleasures, and sins? There have been a thousand such that have turned from the world to God; and there is room for you on the same terms. Have ye ever been given up to open sin? There are a thousand such, that have been turned from their sin and been saved. The dying thief, the adulterous woman of Samaria, the persecuting and murderous Saul, found, on turning to the blood of Jesus, that there was room for them to wash there: and there is room still; yes! there yet is room for you. The door of heaven is indeed too narrow to admit one of your sins with you; but there is abundant room and abundant virtue in the stream in which ye may wash your sins away. Yes! poor sinner! whosoever thou art that art weary of sin, and thirsting for grace and holiness and heaven, come! "there yet is room;" room even *for you*.

2. And again, there is room and welcome even for *the backslider that returns to God*. For thus saith the Lord: "O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help."* "Return, thou backsliding Israel, and I will not cause mine anger to ~~fall~~ upon you."† And again, "I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely."‡ Who so great a backslider

* Hos. xiii. 9.

† Jer. iii. 12.

‡ Hos. xiv. 4.

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Ios. xiv. 4.

as Peter, who with oaths and curses denied that he even knew his Master! Yet Peter turned, with deep repentance and bitter tears, to the Lord; and the Lord had mercy on him, and exalted him among His most devoted servants. And what professing Christian could sink deeper than the incestuous Corinthian? And yet the Apostle Paul encourages the hope that, by the Lord's blessing upon the discipline used with him, his spirit might be “saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”* And are there any brethren here, who, after witnessing a good confession, have gone back to the world; but who now are mourning their ingratitude, and asking if there can be room for them to hope that the Lord will look upon them again? Dear brethren! there is room even for you in the heart of God; there is room even for you in the precious fountain of Jesus' blood. Only come to it by faith. Come to it with dust upon your heads, with tears in your eyes, with deep abasement and repentance in your hearts, and you will find that there is still room, even in heaven, *for you.*

But are there any here, who, through the corruption and perverseness of their hearts, are inclined to turn such gracious promises and assurances as these into an encouragement for their sin? Alas! there always are, there always have been such; but we may not withhold their

* 1 Cor. v. 3—5.

bread from the Lord's children, because there are some who would abuse it to purposes of sensuality and sin. We may not withhold the drop of wine from the weak and wounded sinner, because there are some who drink to drunkenness. We may not hold back the precious declarations of the fulness and the freeness of salvation through the blood of Jesus, because there are some who will conclude they may therefore "continue in sin that grace may abound."* Oh, no! There is room, we repeat, for every penitent sinner, however vile his sins have been. There is room for every backsliding sinner, that returns with deep abasement to the Lord whom he has crucified. But, brethren! there is no room for the impenitent transgressor; no room for the ungodly worldling; no room for the self-righteous Pharisee; no room for the hardened sinner. There is no room for you who make light of these things, and follow your own ways of worldliness and sin. There is no room for you, who have nothing of religion but the name and form, and in whom the Spirit of God has never dwelt. There is no room for you, who think ye are good enough, and will not come as poor polluted sinners to the cross of Christ. There is no room for you, who, though ye are living in sin, yet try to palliate your sins, and think the Lord is too merciful to punish your trans-

* Rom. vi. 1.

gressions. Said I, there is *no room*? Oh! let me withdraw these words, and say, Yes, "*there is room*," room even for you still to repent, still to wash in the blood of Jesus, still to be saved. There is still room for you to turn and forsake these ways; still room for you to seek the grace of the Lord Jesus, and to be cleansed by His Holy Spirit. But while ye refuse to hearken to these calls, while ye go on in ways of worldliness and sin, while ye continue impenitent and unconverted, there is no room for you in heaven! O my friends, while the door is still open, while Jesus still invites, while the Lord still waits, Oh! come, and ye will find that as yet "*there is room*." But, Oh! tarry not; the door will soon be shut, and then there will be room no more. And when the door is shut at last, if ye be shut out, whom can ye blame but yourselves? No one; but your own perverseness, and worldliness, and sin. None keeps you from the door but your own evil heart; none holds you back from the way of life but your own perverse will. O brethren, arouse you and flee to the ark of safety; for, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."* It may be that this is the last time your ears may hear the assurance, that "Yet there is room!"

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

SERMON XXII.

PRAY ALWAYS, FAINT NOT.

LUKE XVIII. 1.

Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

“O THOU that hearest prayer,” exclaims the Psalmist, “to thee shall all flesh come!”* There runs throughout the animal creation an instinctive feeling of dependence upon God. “The eyes of all wait upon thee, O God, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and fillest all things living with plenteousness.”† Man alone sets up himself to be independent of his Maker, and dares, in the pride of his heart, to inquire, “Who is lord over us?”‡

The popular axiom by which his self-complacency is flattered, that Man is a religious creature, is one which seems contradicted by

* Ps. lxxv. 2. † Ps. cxlv. 15, 16. ‡ Ps. xii. 4.

every page in the history of the human race. The first impulse of his fallen nature impelled him to fly and hide himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. And so now, the voice of Providence may have startled the careless one in his neglect of God, and brought him, anxious and alarmed, to his knees, crying out for mercy to the Lord he has offended; yet, no sooner is the pressure of the Lord's hand removed, than he forgets too frequently the vows of his hour of trouble, and strives, by rushing further than ever from the Lord, to blot out the remembrance of his weakness. And, even when the voice of grace, the still small voice of God's Spirit within the soul, has convinced the sinner of his sins, and brought him humbled to the foot of the cross, and led him to look up to God through Jesus Christ as to a father and a friend; there is, nevertheless, no trial against which the regenerate soul has more frequently to contend, than its backwardness to prayer, its tendency to formality in devotion, and the reluctance with which it has to drag itself, as it were, into the presence of its gracious God.

Yet reason and revelation combine in urging upon us, as the great duty of our dependent condition, and the highest privilege of which the soul is capable, that we should draw nigh

unto God. "It is," indeed, "good for us to draw near to God,"* and to pour out our hearts before Him, who is the Lord of all. It is good for us that we should feel and should acknowledge our dependence upon God. It is good for us that we should come, as dependent creatures, unto Him, and draw out of the rich supplies of His goodness and grace, the strength and the support we need. It is good for us, that we should be brought, as needy creatures, unto Him, to sue for mercy, to plead for pardon, to entreat His grace. It is good for us, indeed, that we should be privileged to come to Him, who knoweth those that trust in Him, and should enjoy, in communion with Him, a precious foretaste of that blessedness which fills the souls of the ransomed Church in heaven, wherein is, "in His presence, the fulness of joy."†

And no lovelier example can be found of the blessedness of this great duty, of this great privilege, than He who in the text enjoins the exercise of it upon all who hear His word. Who could, as we might suppose, have had less need of prayer, than He in whom, even in His lowliest state, there dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily?"‡ Yet, where shall we find a brighter illustration of the pre-

* Ps. lxxiii. 28.

† Ib. xvi. 11.

‡ Col. ii. 9.

cept, "that men ought always to pray and not to faint?" It was the refreshment of his weary body, as well as of His tried and tempted soul, to draw near to His Father in heaven. When they who had been endeavouring to compass His destruction went every man to his own house, Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.* When His disciples were seeking the repose they needed at the close of a day spent with Him in going about doing good, He went up into a mountain to pray.† And when they whom He had taken with Him to guard His privacy in the last hours of His earthly ministry were overpowered with sleep, He was on His knees before His Father, crying in His agony, and not fainting nor discouraged in His prayer, that if it were possible the cup might pass from Him.‡ Look then, my beloved, upon Jesus, and see in Him a pattern of the great precept to which I would now invite your earnest attention, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." Let us give heed to the precept now, by entreating His presence and His blessing in our present engagements. Let us lift up our hearts to Him, that He may pour forth upon us the grace of His Spirit, teaching us the true meaning of prayer, filling us with the Spirit of prayer, and giving us the rich

* John viii. 1. † Matt. xiv. 23. ‡ Ib. xxvi. 37—44.

blessing of prayer, in the enjoyment of communion and peace with our Father which is in heaven.

The words of the text will suggest to us a consideration, first, of THE DUTY ENJOINED, to pray always; secondly, of THE REASONS why men ought to pray always; and thirdly, of THE DISCOURAGEMENTS AND DIFFICULTIES against which they must bear up, if they would not faint in prayer. And may the Lord teach us how to pray!

I. Let us consider, in the first place, what is meant by PRAYING ALWAYS.

1. And, first, it means, at least, that we should *pray at regular and stated seasons*. The pealing of the Sabbath bell calls us at stated times to draw near and worship in the sanctuary of God; and surely they do not "pray always," who allow any plea but one of necessity, arising from some providential impediment, to keep them at such seasons from the public service of the Lord's house. The need of family blessings, and gratitude for family mercies, call upon us to set up our altar in our households, and to unite, morning and evening, in the social exercise of prayer and praise; and they do not "pray always" who never, or only occasionally, assemble as a family to bless the Lord for all

His goodness, and to commit themselves to the guidance of His providence and grace. The sense of individual dependence upon God for "life and breath and all things," a remembrance of the many dangers to which we are continually exposed, and of our daily, hourly need of pardon and of grace, these should prompt at least the morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise in the secrecy of our closets; and they, surely, do not "pray always," who do not regularly as the morning dawns upon them, and when they retire to rest, pray to their Father which seeth in secret, and commit themselves, their bodies and their souls, and all for whom they ought to pray, to Him who alone can bless them.

2. To pray always, means *to pray on particular occasions*, in every emergency which seems to call for especial guidance and especial grace, in our pilgrimage through this world of uncertainty and change. How many are the occasions, which seem calculated to draw the Christian's spirit to communion with the Father of mercies in Christ Jesus! Hath some tide of unexpected prosperity flowed in upon us? and shall we not go at once to Him who alone can keep us from falling, and pray that we may not be ensnared by it into forgetfulness of God, or the neglect of our undying souls? Hath any stroke of sudden adversity borne us

down? and shall it not lead us to Him who alone can bless it to us, with the prayer that He will sanctify it to our soul's good, and bring us forth out of the furnace purified and refined? Are we entering upon any business, setting out upon any journey, contemplating any engagement which may have an influence upon us in time and in eternity? and shall we not make every such season an occasion for drawing nigh unto God, seeking diligently to know His will, desiring to be guided by His Word, beseeching that we be not led into temptation, entreating that we be kept from evil? Oh! surely to "pray always" is to make God the repository of all our cares, the guide of all our steps, the guardian of all our interests, the source of all our joys; and "in everything"—whether in gladness or sorrow, whether on temporal or spiritual matters, whether in life or death,—"to make known our requests unto God!"*

3. To pray always, means to *keep alive within the soul the spirit of prayer*. Without this the utmost regularity in going through the stated seasons of public, family, and private worship were, after all, but lip-service. Without this, the habitual use of special thanksgivings and special petitions, according as the occasion calls for them, were mere formalism or hypocrisy.

* Phil. iv. 6.

Without this, whatever may be the frequency of outward exercises of devotion, not only do men not "pray always," they do not pray at all. It is the keeping up of a devotional spirit, the constant lifting up of the heart to God, the pouring out of the soul before Him at all times, which is really the fulfilment of the duty to "pray always." It is not needful, then, in order to obey the Saviour's precept, that we should be always on our knees. In the bustle of business, in the exercise of domestic duties, in the crowded thoroughfare, in the home circle, in the mart of commerce, in the pursuits of literature, in the halls of peace, and in the field of war, the Christian may enjoy a sense of God's presence, and hold communion with his Father in heaven. And there can be no better test than this of the nature of our engagements and their consistency with the will of God. Are we present at a scene of pleasure, with which the recognition of God's presence is evidently inconsistent, and in which we should feel it ourselves to be a mockery to ask God to bless it to our good; are we engaged in any pursuit, upon which we cannot, dare not, ask God to look, and on which we cannot seek His presence with our souls; are we so far immersed in the world, that we cannot lift up our hearts to God; do we so order the arrangements of our families, that, if Jesus were

to visit us as He visited the sisters at Bethany, everything would be felt to be unsuited to His presence? Then, surely, our pleasures or our pursuits, our home arrangements or our out-door cares, are such as are endangering our souls, and showing, too plainly, that we "mind earthly things," and have not our affections "set on things above."

II. Such is, in some measure, the duty enjoined by our blessed Lord in the charge that "men ought always to pray." Let us consider, in the second place, some of THE REASONS, why men ought to pray.

1. And, first, what other reason can we need than this, *It is the command of God?* We need not search far into the Word of God to find abundant precepts, by which He inculcates upon all that would enjoy His favor, the drawing near with the voice of supplication unto Him who made and who redeemed them. Our Lord Jesus, Himself the only channel through which prayer can ascend to God, continually enjoins it. "Ask, and it shall be given you," he says, "seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."* "Watch ye," he enjoins on his chosen ones, "Watch ye, and pray always."† And the Apostles, in the spirit

* Matt. vii. 7.

† Luke xxi. 36.

of their Lord and Master, unceasingly urge the same great duty, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."* "I will," says St. Paul, "that men pray everywhere."† "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God,"‡ saith St. James. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."§

2. Every precept, however, in which the duty of prayer is enjoined, involves a second reason why men ought to "pray always," as it contains in connexion with it *the promise of good to those who pray*. The Lord has not, indeed, bound Himself under any obligation not to do good to any who do not pray. We know that He acts according to His sovereign purpose and grace, and frequently arrests the sinner in the midst of his carelessness and sin, and leads Him to pardon and to peace with Him. Yet, assuredly, there is *no promise* in Scripture, of any blessing, except to those who ask it; while we learn from the very words of Him who cannot lie, that "every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Who is there, then, that desireth good to his own soul? Prayer is the appointed channel through which alone that good can come. Who is there that

* Phil. iv. 6. † 1 Tim. ii. 8. ‡ Jas. i. 5. § Ibid. iv. 8.

has been convinced of his condition as a sinner, and feels his need, his abject need, of mercy, pardon, salvation? God sitteth upon a throne of mercy. Christ Jesus standeth at His right hand, the Friend, the Advocate of sinners. Let the guilty soul draw near, and looking unto Jesus, pour out the sighings of his contrite heart before the Lord: and he shall have the pardon and the peace he needs. Who is there, that, having fled to Jesus and put Him on as his righteousness and peace, yet finds himself beset with perplexities, encompassed with temptations, assailed by sins? The refuge is before him, the way is open, the reception sure. For "God is faithful, who will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it."* Who is there, that, desirous of walking with God through faith in Christ Jesus, is yet encompassed with cares, surrounded with trials, damped by disappointments, pressed down by bereavements, stricken with calamity, overwhelmed with suffering and sorrow? He is invited to cast all his care upon God, who careth for him;† he is urged to bring every sorrow and every suffering to his gracious Father, who pitieth him "as a father does his children;" he is assured that the Lord knoweth

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

† 1 Pet. v. 7.

them that put their trust in Him, that "He also will hear their cry and will help them."* Who, then, is there who desires the good of his own soul? Who that desires comfort in sorrow, strength against temptation, sympathy in suffering, support in trial, pardon of sin, grace to overcome corruption, and the Spirit of God to sanctify to him every dispensation? Surely, he ought to pray; to "pray always;" to keep up a spirit of prayer; for prayer opens the windows of heaven, so that showers of blessings are poured forth; prayer mounts upon the wings of the angels of God, that ascend and descend upon the Son of man,† and brings down by their ministry the grace which He sees needful, who hath Himself "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," and on whom our iniquities were laid.‡

3. "Men ought to pray always," because believing prayer not only has the promise of good to the soul of him that offers it, but is also the most effectual means which any Christian can employ *for doing good to the souls of others*. Our Lord Himself, in his treatment of the Apostle Peter, affords us a lovely example of the value of intercessory prayer. He cautioned Peter, He warned him of his danger, He reproved Him for his self-sufficiency; and He

* Ps. cxlv. 19. † John i. 51. ‡ Isa. liii. 5, 6.

prayed for him that his faith should not fail.* His cautions were unheeded; His warnings only led the disciple on to greater self-confidence and boasting; His reproofs seemed to mortify Peter's feelings without abating his pride. But His prayer for him was heard; and the self-confident Peter, while he learnt by his fall his own utter weakness and worthlessness, was yet sustained and recovered by the grace which his Master had entreated for him. The Christian is a member of a family, of a community, of a Church. There are members of his household whom he cannot influence by his warnings; there are members of the community whom his remonstrances cannot reach; there are brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus, whose trials he may feel for, but cannot relieve; whose inconsistencies he may mourn over, but cannot remedy; but for all these he can pray: and He who has commanded that "intercessions be made for all men,"† will assuredly bless His own ordinance, and do good, as He seeth best, to those whose cases are thus brought before Him. And Oh! who is there, that has found the door of access open to the presence of the Lord, our Father in Christ Jesus, that is not deeply responsible for the use he makes of this great privilege; and who ought not diligently to employ it in pleading

* Luke xxii. 31, 32.

† 1 Tim. i. 1.

for blessings upon those who pray not for themselves, for grace for every one that is near and dear to him, for peace to all them that love the Lord Jesus, for the conversion of the ungodly, the comfort of the afflicted, the support of the tried; for the success of every effort for the good of man, and the coming of God's kingdom of grace and glory in every nation, in every land!

III. So reasonable seems the duty, so high the privilege, so manifold the encouragements, so rich the blessings of believing prayer, that we should suppose the Christian, at least, would require little urging to persevere in "praying always." Yet, alas! the hindrances, the discouragements are many, and we, therefore, propose to consider, in the third place, SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES against which men must bear up, if they would not faint in prayer.

1. And, first, there are impediments in the way, *which keep us back from prayer*. The cares and business of this present life often discompose the mind, and fill it with such earthliness, that he who desires his prayer to be a spiritual offering and not a mere formal service, shrinks from thus drawing nigh to Him who "is a Spirit," and must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth."*

* John iv. 24.

anticipated engagements of business or pleasure leave us, perhaps, but a few moments for prayer, and we are ready to admit the suggestion, that it is better to postpone it altogether, than to offer such a hasty sacrifice. Our great Adversary, the Devil, desirous above all things to keep the soul from prayer, assumes the form of an angel of light,* and urges us by a sense of the holiness of God not to venture into His presence, unless the heart be right with Him, and the mind be free from distractions; and raises such difficulties in the way as tempt us to think it were better to wait for some more prayerful season, and to let the present occasion pass by. Yet, surely, these are all temptations, against which the Christian must bear up. If we allow the worldliness and distraction of our minds to keep us away from prayer, are we likely, when we have given the enemy such an advantage, to be less beset with these imaginations at any future time? How are we to get rid of our earthly-mindedness, how to get the better of our coldness and distraction, how to acquire a frame of mind more suited to communion with the Lord but by going to Him for it; and, in spite of every impediment, throwing ourselves upon His mercy, and pouring out our perplexities before Him.

2. Again, there are difficulties in the way of

* 2 Cor. xi. 14.

the spiritual worshipper even *when he is engaged in prayer*. The mere formalist may go through his exercises of devotion, and be unconscious of any such impediment; but who that has been taught the real nature of prayer, and led to draw near to God in spiritual communion with Him, has not found the time of prayer a time at which all the vanities of the world and sin, and all the temptations of the flesh and of the Devil peculiarly beset him? How often will the memory be then thronged with thoughts of the merest trifles that have ever engaged the mind; and the plans and projects of the coming day spread themselves out before the mental view, when the heart should rather be fixing its affections upon God, and the soul be pouring out its sorrows and its need into the bosom of its loving Saviour! What Christian has not been constrained to cry out with horror of himself, and to admire the forbearance and long-suffering of God in not abandoning him to a reprobate mind, when he remembers how his imagination has been defiled and his soul polluted with evil memories or desires, perhaps at the very moment when he has been bending at the table of His Lord, to show forth his dying love? Yet, despite these temptations, "men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Give way to these suggestions, let them drive you from a throne of grace, and Satan's victory is gained. Resist them, strive against

them, persevere in spite of them, faint not, nor be discouraged by them, and the enemy shall flee from you, and the Lord will manifest Himself to you and give you peace.

3. And, thirdly, there are difficulties keeping down the soul of the believer *after he has been engaged in prayer*. He does not truly pray who does not wait for the answer. Yet, perhaps, no sooner does he come forth from his closet, than some worldly conversation claims his attention, or some worldly care intrudes itself into his mind; perhaps, no sooner does he leave the house of God, than the trivial remark or the worldly project distracts his thoughts and engrosses his feelings. It may be that the subject of his prayers is one for which he has again and again besieged the throne of grace, and the evil one is ready with the temptation, that it is of no use for him to pray. It may be, that the mind has been peculiarly harassed during prayer, and the suggestion is readily made, that it were presumption to expect an answer to such wandering requests. Or, it may be, that the heart has been lifted up by the exercise of the gift of utterance and fluency in prayer, and the mind, carried away by the current of its performances, well-nigh forgets its dependance upon God. Who is there that has ever prayed at all that has not experienced some of these impediments in the way of his watching unto prayer? Yet,

who is there that is not charged, despite all these discouragements, to pray and faint not, remembering that it is of grace from first to last, that the Lord bestows the mercy that is needed, and that nothing would more rejoice the Enemy of souls than that he should succeed by these temptations, in keeping the soul back from prayer, and driving it from the mercy-seat of God?

Let me now enquire of you, beloved, what know ye of prayer?

1. Prayer is *the first symptom of spiritual life*. For when the Lord would encourage Ananias to visit the once persecuting Saul, he announces to him that "Behold he prayeth."* Often had he, who, after the straitest sect of his religion, had lived a Pharisee, gone through the form of long and stated prayers; but it was only now, that the grace of God had touched his heart, that he really prayed. And how many of you, beloved, may have gone through the outward service of devotion, and yet, may never have offered up a prayer to God? Have ye, like Saul, been convinced of your condition as lost sinners, and thrown yourselves for mercy upon the loving-kindness of the Saviour Jesus? Have ye cried out of the depth of your corruption unto Him who died for you, and pleaded with Him for

* Acts ix. 11.

mercy, pardon, and peace? If so, pray always; persevere, faint not, nor be discouraged. It may be, that the Lord may keep you waiting, to see what is in your heart; but let your soul follow hard after Him, and He will lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.

2. Secondly, prayer is *the best test of spiritual health*; for the soul can no more be in health without continual prayer, than the body can flourish without constant respiration. Prayer is to the soul, what the play of the lungs is to the body. There may be a sickly life while the respiration is oppressed and the lungs diseased; but the moment their action ceases, life is fled. And so there may be something like spiritual life in the soul, while yet prayer is heartless, and supplication cold; but let prayer be entirely given up, and the soul will surely sink into the slumber of death. Then only is the soul prospering and in health, when prayer is in vigorous exercise, and the spirit is continually panting after God, desiring more and more of His presence, seeking more and more to be conformed to His will. Beloved, how do your souls prosper? Is prayer to you a spiritual service? Are the breathings of your soul directed towards God? Do ye in everything pour out your hearts before Him; engaging in nothing upon which ye cannot ask His blessing; anxious about nothing which ye

cannot commit to Him, coming to Him at all times as a Father and a Friend, and casting all your care upon Him who careth for you? Pray always then, beloved, faint not nor be weary, and in His good time your petition shall be changed into thanksgiving, and your prayer be turned to praise.

3. Lastly, prayer is *the highest state of spiritual privilege*; for it is the enjoyment of communion with God our reconciled Father. The great privilege of Adam's state of innocence, was his enjoyment of the presence of the Lord God; his walking and talking with Him as a friend. The highest privilege of man's regenerated condition, when he has been "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son," is his being permitted to draw near to God, and hold communion and sweet intercourse with Him, through the mediation of Jesus. Surely, to pray in earnest, with acceptance, with favor, is to enjoy a foretaste here below of the blessedness of the saints above. And yet, how often is the believer constrained to drag himself to prayer, when he should rather fly to it as his privilege, his delight. Beloved, how is this with you? Is your backwardness to prayer a pain and grief to you? Does your soul long after communion with God? Have ye any enjoyment of His

presence, any sense of His love, any fellowship with Him? Oh! if not, beloved, what is your hope of heaven, what your interest in its blessings, what your meetness for its joys? But if ye have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have experienced the blessedness of communion with Him, ye surely will scarce need to be urged to pray always, to faint not, nor be discouraged. So shall your "loins be girded and your lights burning, and yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding, that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching."*

* Luke xii. 36, 37.

SERMON XXIII.

NOW DARKLY—THEN FACE TO FACE.

1 COR. XIII. 12.

*Now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face
to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I
know even as also I am known.*

“OUR light affliction,” saith the Apostle, again writing to the same Church of the Corinthians, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

Oh! would, then, that we had a more realizing sense of the nearness and the vastness of Eternity! Would that we brought its light to bear

* 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

more than we do upon the things of time and sense! How different would be our estimate of the joys of this vain and fleeting world, did we look upon them in some measure as we shall do when we look back from an eternal scene! How different would be our view of the trials and sorrows of this brief pilgrimage, if we regarded them as parts of the process by which the Lord prepares His people for Himself, and contrasted them with the glory which shall be revealed in His faithful ones!

There are times when the Lord seems, in a peculiar manner, to open upon us a view of Eternity; when He causes the glare of its awful realities to startle the sinner in his path; or a beam from its glories to shine upon the tried and afflicted walk of those whom He is bringing through the furnace. There are times when the rapid summons of one and another from the very circle in which we move seems to call upon young and old to pause and to consider, as they too are hurrying towards the narrow line which divides the visible from the eternal world, and to enquire what fitness they are provided with against the moment when their own call shall come. There are times when the dying voices of those that fall asleep in Jesus, bearing testimony to the peace which sustains them amid nature's agony, and to the hope which cheers

them amid the pangs of parting with all that has been precious and beloved on earth, appear like the messages of redeemed spirits bending down from the joys on which they have already entered, while they call upon the worldly to believe that there is a truth, a substance in the Christian's consolations, and urge those that believe to give increasing diligence "to make their calling and election sure." And who can doubt that we, brethren, are fallen upon such times as these? Within the one short month which has gone with its account to God since the new year dawned upon us, how many and how various have been the calls which the voice of God's providence, speaking from the death-beds of the young and old, has addressed to this community. Yea, even since the morning of the last Sabbath, how thickly and how fast have the visitations of the Lord's hand appealed to us on one side and another, startling us, as it were, by the tidings that the angel of the Lord is among us, either warning us of the need to put our house in order, lest his hand be laid upon us suddenly in an instant, or cheering us with the assurance of the victory which the grace of the Lord Jesus gives over the pains of death, of the peace with which His promises sustain the soul, in the prospect of a blessed and a glorious eternity. Beloved, shall

these calls pass by us unimproved? Shall these dispensations leave us as worldly, as careless, as unbelieving as before? The Lord forbid it! The Lord accompany by His grace, and apply by His Spirit the teachings of His providence! The Lord, whose hand is abroad among us, in mercy, enable us to "hear the rod and who hath appointed it!"* The Lord touch and soften the hearts of such as look upon the afflictions of those around them, as if they conveyed no lesson to themselves! The Lord console the wounded hearts of those whom the stroke of His hand hath bowed down in bereavement and distress! The Lord quicken the souls of His people, and lead them to maintain a closer walk with Him, and to cherish a livelier hope and more earnest expectation of an inheritance amid His coming glories!

I would desire, beloved, to suggest for your improvement of this solemn season, the words of the Apostle, in the text. The dispensations of the Lord's hand will surely suggest, even to the unthinking, some reflection upon the contrast between the present and the everlasting portion of those that love the Lord. The darkness which enshrouds many of His dealings with His creatures, and veils the motives which direct the arrows from His hand at one rather than another,

* Micah vi. 9.

will surely constrain the thinking to admit the sovereignty of His dispensations, and lead them to look forward with joy to that brighter scene, where everything that is now hidden shall be revealed, and all that is now dark shall be made light before His people. I would pray the Lord to dispose you all, by His Spirit, so to contemplate His dealings, that ye may be ready to "be still and know that He is God:"* and so to dwell upon the contrast which the text suggests, that ye may be continually looking for and hasting unto that glorious kingdom, where there shall be no more night, but the Lord shall be the everlasting light, and God the glory of His people.

The text suggests for our consideration, beloved, a view, first, of THE PRESENT CONDITION of the Christian, so far as concerns his knowledge of the purposes and dealings of the Lord in providence and in grace; and secondly, the contemplation of THE FUTURE GLORIES that await the true follower of Jesus in the world of light. "Now," saith the Apostle, "we see through a glass darkly;" "now, I know in part." "THEN we shall see face to face;" "then I shall know, even as also I am known." May the Lord enable you to perceive, beloved, how far this is your present condition; and how far ye may look forward to that glorious expectation!

* Ps. xlv. 10.

I. In considering THE PRESENT CONDITION of the Christian, we are led to observe,

1. That, *there is a difference between even his present state*, as an enlightened follower of Jesus, *and the state in which he lay by nature*, until the Spirit of God enlightened him. “Now,” saith the Apostle, “we see through a glass darkly;” but there was a time when we did not see at all. By nature we are in darkness and in the shadow of death; by nature we are blind, ignorant, beclouded.

Simple as is the plan which the Lord has set forth for saving sinners, plain as is, to one whom the Spirit of the Lord has taught, the way of salvation through faith alone in a crucified Jesus, yet what a mystery does it appear to the natural man; yea, what a stumbling block in the way of the carnal and unconverted heart. And plain as is frequently the purpose which the Lord has in view in many of His dispensations, yet how slow is the unconverted man to perceive the hand of God in every, the most trifling, event that befalls him; how strange, how revolting to His feelings the idea, that in the severest strokes of the Lord’s hand, there is not only wisdom, but also love. Even the child of God, indeed, may be unable, while under the heavy pressure of affliction, to realize this truth for his comfort and support; but to the unconverted the very

idea seems harsh and grating, that the wound which makes his very heart to bleed, is inflicted in love and tenderness.

It may be feared, that this is unsavory truth to the natural man, more especially to him whose mind is enlightened with the wisdom of the world, whose understanding is furnished with the treasures of earthly lore. Yet, unpalatable as it is, it is no less a plain and an important truth, that the most cultivated intellect is dark as chaos, with regard to the things of God, until it be enlightened by the Spirit of God, and taught by wisdom from on high.

2. We, secondly, observe, *that he*, who has been thus enlightened from on high, *is enabled to perceive and know something*, at least, of the purposes and the glory of God, even in this probationary state. He is "turned from darkness to light."* "For God, who at the first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into his heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."†

He sees the glory of God displayed in the wondrous plan of salvation, by which the sinner is saved of mere grace, accepted freely in Christ Jesus, delivered from the bondage of corruption, and adopted into the family of the heirs of

* Acts xxvi. 18.

† 2 Cor. iv. 6.

heaven. The cross of Christ, which was to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness;* which still offends him who cannot see that all his good works are good for nothing as grounds of acceptance with God, and which is still foolishness to him who cannot bear to be told that there is but the one way of salvation for him and for the most ignorant or the most abandoned of his fellow-men; this cross of Christ is the glory and the joy of him who is spiritually enlightened. He reads in the print of the nails, from which the gushing blood of Jesus flowed, the truth that “without shedding of blood, there is no remission” of sin;† he hears in the dying cry of Him who hung upon the tree, the assurance that his sins have been remitted, and his iniquities borne away. He sees in the darkness which surrounds the cross a testimony of that dread hatred of sin which constrained even the loving Father to hide His face from His beloved One for sinners’ sakes; he hears in the rejoicing cry, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” a proof of that wrath having passed away from all who are in Christ Jesus, and that in Him, their Surety, they are at peace with God. He perceives, then, in the cross, how “mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other;”‡ how the

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

† Heb. ix. 22.

‡ Ps. lxxxv. 10.

Lord can be "a just God," and yet "a Saviour;"* how he himself, vile and polluted as he is, can yet be thus reconciled and at peace with God, can yet be the friend of Jesus, and an heir of heaven.

And as he thus sees something of the glory of God in the great scheme of man's salvation, so he is enabled also to perceive the traces of God's loving hand in the various dispensations of His providence. It is the precious privilege of the Christian, and a thing which distinguishes him from the mere child of the world, to see God's hand in every thing, and to trace His footsteps even upon the great deep. Where men in general see but the course of nature, he sees the finger of the Lord. Where the world would dwell upon mere second causes, he looks up, through them all, to the sovereign and disposing hand of God. Where the children of the world recognise but the pressure of a hard fate, he sees the presence of a loving and gracious Father, who "doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."† When others are calculating upon the chances of life, and arraigning fortune for the calamities that oppress them, he knows that his times are in the Lord's hands, and that all things are ordered of Him. And the blessedness of his privilege is this; he

* Isa. xlv. 21.

† Lam. iii. 33.



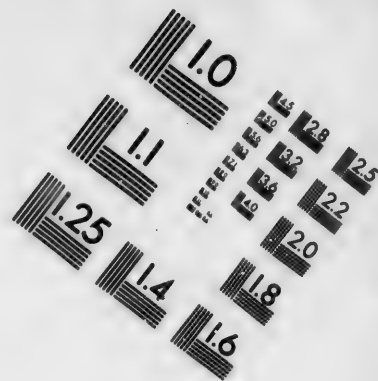
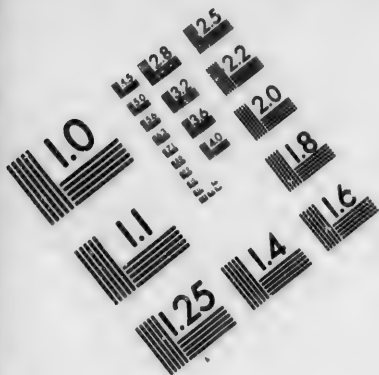
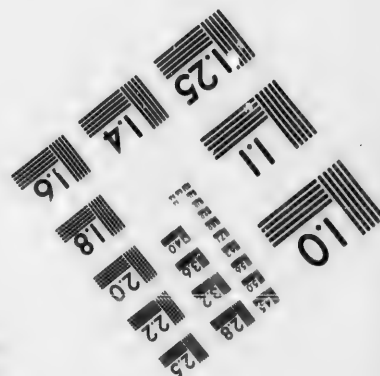
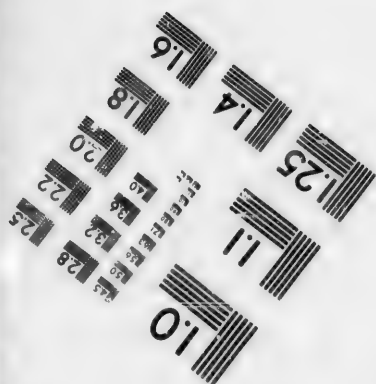
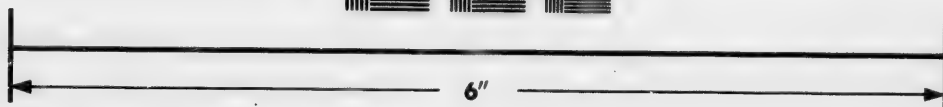
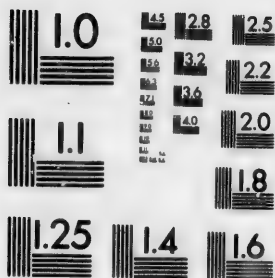


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knows that the hand which apportions him his lot is the hand of a Father and a Friend; he is assured, that whatever be the Lord's dispensations, they are guided by wisdom and by love, and knows, that when the pressure of His hand is most painful, its chastening is still inflicted "for his profit, that he may be partaker of God's holiness."* Beloved, if this be the condition, this the character of the enlightened follower of Jesus, who would not desire to share its comforts, and to partake its blessings?

3. Yet we observe, thirdly, concerning his present condition, that *there are limits to the knowledge which the Christian now enjoys* concerning the purposes, in providence and in grace, of our loving and gracious God. He sees indeed, but it is "through a glass, darkly;" he knows, but it is only "in part."

How true is this concerning the knowledge which even the enlightened soul enjoys, with regard to the mystery of godliness! He sees and knows something, indeed, concerning that wondrous mystery; but yet how little, compared with what there is to be known. He knows, in connexion with the great scheme of his salvation, something of the deceitfulness of his own heart, the depravity of his nature, the corruption of his soul: yet, who can fathom the depths of

* Heb. xii. 10.

desperate wickedness that lie hidden in his heart; nay, who can even "understand his errors," or tell the thousand sins of thought, of word, of act, that continually defile him? He knows something, indeed, of the plan by which his sins are transferred to Christ, and the righteousness of God imputed to him: but who can comprehend the mystery of the manifestation in human flesh of Him who is "God over all?" who can understand the way in which the Christian dwells in Christ, and Christ by His Spirit dwells in him, subduing his iniquities, renewing his nature, comforting him in tribulation, sustaining him in death; who can explain the wonders of that "love which passeth knowledge," or sound the depth and height, or measure the length and breadth of the fulness that is in Christ? He knows, indeed, something of the nature of that portion which the Lord has provided for His ransomed ones in His eternal kingdom; yes, he has even tasted something of its blessedness, and caught a glimpse of the celestial city: but who can sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, who tell the glories that surround the throne of God, who even picture to his ardent mind the joys that are at His right hand, the scenes of glory and of light in which the people of the Lord pass that eternal Sabbath wherein there is no end of

thankfulness and praise? Yet, if the part be so entrancing, if the little that we know of peace with God, and of the anticipated glories of His people be so elevating, so glorious, Oh! who that believes the record that we bear, can go on, as so many do, ignorant of Jesus, and uninterested in His glory?

And how limited is the Christian's knowledge concerning the purposes of the Lord's dispensations, and the rule of his providential dealings! He sees indeed, the general purpose of the Lord; he knows that His dealings with His people are all in love; he is assured, that His dispensations with himself are all designed 'o profit him, by weaning his affections from the world, and leading him to greater spirituality, to more frequent communion with the Lord, to a more ardent longing for His glory, and greater diligence to be made meet for His kingdom: yet, if he allows himself to ask, Why this particular dispensation? if he ventures to enquire, What is the gracious purpose that the Lord has specially in view in this dealing of His providence? how often will he find himself at fault. He sees one taken from a scene of usefulness, just at the moment when, as far as he can judge, the cause of God would have been most promoted by his stay; he sees another kept lingering upon a bed of sickness, in uselessness,

so far as man can discern, a very burden, it may be, upon those around ; he sees the young struck down, perhaps in a moment ; and the aged, in the prolongation of their stay enquiring, " Why tarry the wheels of his chariot ? " he sees the parent, just at the moment when a parent's care is most important, taken from a helpless charge ; he sees the husband bereaved of the desire of his eyes with a stroke ; he sees the child called away from a widowed mother, who was leaning upon him as the prop of her declining years ; and though he sees the hand of God in this, and knows the motive of all these dispensations is love to His people's souls, yet he sees but " darkly " the wisdom which has so arranged, and is constrained to be dumb and not open his mouth, because it is the Lord that has done it.* " Clouds and darkness are round about Him ; " yet " righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne."† " His way is in the sea : and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known."‡

II. Yet, let us proceed, beloved, to consider in contrast with this present darkness, which still remains even upon the mind of him who is taught of God, THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD which awaits him in his

* Ps. xxxix. 9. † Ps. xcvi. 2. ‡ Ib. lxxvii. 19.

eternal state. Then shall he see "face to face:" then shall he know "even as also he is known."

1. How glorious this expectation, with regard, first, to *the wonders of redeeming love*. The eye hath not seen indeed, nor the ear heard, neither hath the heart of man conceived "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Yet, though we cannot comprehend their fulness and extent, we can form some idea of their nature; for "God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit:"* and we know in this way that the chief joys of a redeemed soul are the possession of peace with God, the enjoyment of communion with Him by the Spirit, the realizing the presence of Jesus with the inmost soul, the out-pouring of the heart to God as a reconciled God and Father in Christ Jesus. "Now," how many things disturb this peace; how many are the interruptions to this communion with God; how frequent the clouds which rise between us and the light of the Saviour's countenance; how many the clogs which keep down the aspirations of the soul, and weigh down the wings of prayer and praise! But, "then," there shall be none of this. Then we shall see the blessed Jesus as He is. Then shall we behold the loving Saviour face to face, and know Him as well as we are known. Faith

* 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

now sustains the soul in peace with God, and as faith becomes weak its peace is disturbed; but what shall disturb its peace, when it rests not on faith, but sight, when we shall see Him, and be with Him, beholding His glory, feasting on His love? Hope now supports the soul amid the faintings and the fears of this tried pilgrimage, and as hope flags, the comforts of the soul decay. But what shall affect its blessedness, when hope is exchanged for enjoyment, and the soul shall have entered on the full possession of the glories of our Father's house? To be with Jesus, to behold Him face to face, to see Him as He is, to gaze upon the glories of His eternal state, to comprehend the vastness of His love for man, to pore over the depth of His humiliation, to be clothed with the brightness of His glory, to be changed into a complete resemblance to His image, to know Him as intimately as He knows us, and this without any risk of change, this for ever, and for ever; Oh! who can think of this as the portion of the Lord's ransomed people, and not desire to know and be assured that he is among the number?

2. And how precious is the expectation which the text holds out, secondly, concerning the view that then shall break upon the Christian of *the nature of the Lord's dealings* with him while

passing through this vale of tears. The Israelite was charged by Moses, to remember when he should have arrived at the promised land, all the way by which the Lord had led him in the wilderness; how He had suffered him to hunger, and fed him with manna; how He had chastened him as a father doth his children; in what manner He had sustained and comforted him amid all the trials of his way.* And how clear will be the retrospect which the Christian, arrived at the heavenly Canaan, will be enabled to take of the various trials of the pilgrimage through which he was prepared unto glory. How completely will the cloud which now hangs over the dealings of the Lord's providence be then cleared away; how brightly will the light then shine upon every dark corner of the path, which here often terrified and affrighted him. How clearly will he then perceive the whole process by which all things have worked together for his good; how plainly discern the love that guided every step by which he advanced in meetness for God's kingdom! The providences which here seemed so mysterious,—how transparent will they then appear; the strokes, which were not more painful than they were unaccountable,—how well timed will they then seem, how exactly suited to accomplish what the Lord

* Deut. viii. 1—5.

would have had done. How important will then seem the bearing of many a trifle, as he here considered it, upon his usefulness or his peace; how momentous will he then perceive to have been the mere casual word, which here he thought could have little influence for either good or evil! The dispensations, which he hoped would have been blessed to others, but was disappointed of his hope,—he will then see to have been arrows shot at a venture, which hit just where the Lord directed them; the trials by which his own path was beset, he will perceive to have been the thorns by which the Lord hedged up his way to keep him from straying to the right hand or to the left. And Oh! how wonderful shall then seem to him all the way by which the Lord hath led him; how sweet shall it then be to trace the hand of love, when here he shrunk as from the anger of the Lord; how glorious the confirmation he shall then enjoy of the truth, that neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord!*

How cheering, then, how animating the expectation thus held out in the prospect of the dark valley, whose shadows now seem as it were to be fitting around us. The thought of death

* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

is usually a fearful and a painful one. Men commonly regard it as a dreaded visitant, clothed with terrors, whose coming is enough to make the stoutest heart to quail. Yet how differently would it be viewed, if men looked upon it simply as the line which separates the present time of darkness, of doubtings, and of fears, from an eternity of glory, and of joy, and peace; the step which transfers the Christian from the prison-house of the sinful flesh to the glorious mansions of eternal liberty. Dearly beloved, have ye this hope, this confidence in Christ? Do ye believe that your sins are blotted out in the blood of the Lamb, that your soul is reconciled and at peace with God? Do ye believe that Christ has gone to prepare a place for you, and that when He comes again He will receive you to Himself, that where He is, there ye may be also? * Then surely if ye believe this, though there may be some natural shrinkings from dissolution, ye cannot dread the messenger which comes to call you to your glory, nor start back in terror from the passage which, albeit dark in itself, yet opens upon the glories of your heavenly home. Why are men afraid to die? Is it not because their sins are unforgiven, or their hearts are set upon the world? Oh! surely if ye have laid your sins upon Jesus, and set your

* John xiv. 2, 3.

affections upon things above, ye cannot so dread the way which Jesus passed before you, and which leads to the glories and the joys of Eternity.

How comforting, how elevating the hope which the text supplies, concerning the present condition of the blessed, to those who are called upon to mourn the stroke of bereavement! We see not indeed what comfort either reason or religion can supply concerning those who died, but gave no sign, either in their life or in their death, of their being the accepted children of the living God. But have they whom the Lord has taken to Himself given any warrant for the hope (as we trust some at least of those have done, upon whom the cold earth has closed during the week just past), that they fell asleep in Jesus, then who can think upon the glorious change which an instant made in their condition, who can realize, in however faint a measure, the blessedness and joy on which their souls have entered, and yet repine beneath the stroke which bore their beloved ones to glory? How are they now rejoicing in the unclouded smile of the Saviour's face; how are they now feeding upon His love; how are they now tuning their harps to His praise! How are they now resting from the pains of this wearisome pilgrimage, how are they praising the love which led them on their way; how are

they rejoicing that their toils are over, and that their crown is won! And can the heart that smarts most bitterly beneath the stroke which tore them from its fond embrace, indulge one wish to bring them back again from the glories of their Father's house, or mourn with unavailing grief their removal from the sins and sorrows of this painful scene? Be not ignorant, then, beloved, "concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no" such "hope, that them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."* Look not back upon the stroke which has severed, but forward to the hour which shall reunite, you. Think of the joys on which they now have entered; think of their white robes and everlasting palms; and aim at following in the path they trod, that ye too may come, as "the ransomed of the Lord to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon your heads; and may obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."†

Yet, beloved, the realities of Eternity are not comforting to all. There are some who "then shall know even as also they are known;" but who shall know the truth of the terrors they made light of, shall know the preciousness of salvation by its irreparable loss. And who are

* 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.

† Isa. xxxv. 10.

these? They who are not in Christ; they who believe not that He is the Saviour, and who die in their sins. Oh! then, beloved, shall not the warning lessons of God's providence, shall not the messages of His love, which speak from many a dying bed at this season, lead you to search diligently, whether ye are Christ's or no? Have ye closed with the offers of His love? Have ye accepted His great salvation? Has He washed you in His blood? Has He sanctified you by His Spirit? Oh! put not off the decision of these questions till the solemn hour is past, and ye wake up to find it is too late! that there is "a worm which dieth not, a fire which never shall be quenched." *

* Mark ix. 44.

SERMON XXIV.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION.

JOEL III. 14.

*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision :
for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of
decision.*

THE prophetic Scriptures, generally, appear to have had a double meaning ; one referring to some speedy accomplishment, another predicting some more distant issue. The prophecies of the Old Testament have for the most part a reference to some purpose of the Lord, with regard to the immediate circumstances of the Jewish people ; and a more remote, but not less palpable, application to the then future day of Gospel privileges and blessings. Some of them indeed, in addition to their primary reference to the circumstances of the Jews, relate to two distinct portions of the Gospel dispensation ; the one, the

coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in great humility, the other, the coming of the same gracious Being amid the clouds of heaven, attended by His saints and angels.

In the chapter of the text, the prophet Joel gazes, in prophetic vision, upon some vast harvest-field, in which the wheat and the tares have grown up together, and the season has drawn nigh, in which the one portion has ripened for the destruction that awaits the enemies of the Lord, the other for the full accomplishment of all the Lord's gracious purposes in the deliverance and exaltation of His saints. He beholds the various kings and people, that have been from time to time arrayed in enmity against the Israel of God, assembled by their hosts in the valley of vision; and sees them, as each one has answered the purpose for which the Lord commissioned them against His people, cut down, one after another, by their successors in the scale of earthly dominion. When Israel rebelled against the Lord, the Assyrian was permitted to vex them; and "howbeit he meant not so, neither did his heart think so,"* yet he was but an instrument in administering the Lord's chastisements to His people. Soon as his rage against the Hebrews had reached the bounds where it was said, *Hither shalt thou come, but*

* Isa. x. 7.

no further, the Medes and Persians checked his ambitious course, and became in their turn the "arm of the Lord," by which He punished his rebellious children. They, again, were restrained by the Macedonian conqueror, who also, in his turn, was the means of correcting the back-sliding Jews; and his power again was divided and weakened in the persons of his successors, till finally the Grecian arms were compelled to yield to the conquering Romans, who, once more, were the Lord's agents in visiting and correcting His people. All this passed in review before the Prophet's astonished gaze; and he beheld multitude after multitude assembled for the correction of rebellious Israel, and one after another passing away when the day of the Lord came near.

But, though the first glance of the Prophet's eye may have rested upon such a scene of speedy downfall to the enemies of Israel, "the day of the Lord," of which he speaks as near, must lead our minds onward to a scene of far deeper solemnity and more fearful judgment than ever yet has fallen upon any of the inhabitants of earth. Dimly, it may be, yet surely, did the eye of the inspired servant of the Lord behold, through the mists of coming years, the approaching glory of the Lord of Hosts, and view the gathering of small and great in the vast valley of judgment,

before the throne of Him who made, and who shall judge, the worlds. Dimly, it may be, but surely, did his enraptured spirit take in the promise of the Lord's appearing for the blessing of His people and the confusion of His foes; and, catching the glad tidings which announce the day of the Lord, in which the Lord of life should manifest Himself in humbled form for man's redemption, still run on in its anticipations of the yet future day, when He, having received to Himself the kingdom of His purchase, shall return to reign in Zion and before His ancients gloriously, having put all enemies beneath His feet.

The things which thus were but dimly seen, at best, by kings and prophets of the olden dispensation, supply to the Church of Christ, at the present period, the theme of either thankful remembrance, or joyous expectation. The day of the Lord, which was most nearly within the range of the Prophet's view, the day on which the Lord should come in great humility, has now passed by to us; and our Church, regarding the event that day brought forth, as the subject of her children's most grateful celebration, would fix their minds upon it at this season, and call upon them, by devout and thankful meditation, to prepare their minds and hearts for a due commemoration of the natal day of her Redeemer and her Lord. The day of the

Lord, to which the words of him who speaketh under holy inspiration, in the chapter of the text, refer, the day, in which our blessed Lord, surrounded by His mediatorial glories, attended by His subject hosts, shall come again in the same manner, perhaps on the same spot on which He parted from His chosen ones, and was received up to heaven—this is now the subject of continual expectation; and our Church, knowing how profitable is a state of watchfulness, would keep her children's minds upon the stretch, and encourage them to be "looking for, and hasting unto," the coming of that day of God. The signs which herald its approach may be signs of terror to the multitudes of the earth, to those that in the coming Lord shall recognise Him whom they have pierced, but in whose wounded side they have not found a shelter, in whose flowing blood they have not washed their robes, nor blotted out their sins; but the same signs must fill their hearts with joy, who are bidden, "when these things begin to come to pass, to look up and lift up their heads, because their redemption draweth nigh;"* who anticipate, at their Lord's return, the full display of the glories He hath put upon His Church, and the consummation of all the blessed hopes with which His people have looked forward to His presence in His kingdom.

* Luke xxi. 28.

As each year rolls round, and, at the recurrence of this gladdening season of our Church's festivals, our minds are again and again directed to the anticipated coming of our Lord, the eye of faith is enabled to perceive a gradual accumulation of the symptoms of His near approach, and to trace with re-awakened interest in the footsteps of the long-scattered Israel, and with increasing joy in the spread of the Gospel of Jesus among the long-benighted Gentiles, the signs of the fulfilment of the Lord's predictions concerning the time when He shall come again. 'Tis true, indeed, that scarcely has there been a period in the world's history, since the ascension of the Lord Jesus to His Father's right hand, at which it could be said, The Lord cannot yet return, for He must wait the accomplishment of such and such predictions, and there is no appearance of the signs by which His coming was to be forerun;—yet 'tis no less true that, within later days, the fulfilment of prophetic intimations, concerning the things that shall immediately precede His coming, has been so much more plain, as almost to constrain the most careless to admit that we live in times of deep and awful moment, and that at least *some* mighty crisis is approaching unto all that dwell upon the earth.

In immediate connexion with the declaration

of the text, the Prophet pours forth a strain of lively predictions, concerning the blessings which the coming day of the Lord shall restore to the long-scattered and neglected Israel. To the present condition, and the promises which set forth the future prospects of that extraordinary people, your attention has been but little, at any time, invited; and I therefore would desire, beloved, by the Lord's blessing, to present it for your consideration, on some of the succeeding Sabbaths of this Advent season. Upon the solemn event itself, the coming of the day of God, and the vision which met the Prophet's view as he looked forward to that day, let our present meditations be engaged; and may He, who having come to save, will come again to judge, give you all so to make Him your salvation now, that when He shall come again, this song upon your lips shall welcome His return, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us: This is the Lord: we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." *

"Multitudes, multitudes," saith the prophet, "in the valley of decision; for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." WHAT IS THIS VALLEY? WHO ARE THEY THAT SHALL BE GATHERED THERE? HOW IS IT THAT THIS DAY

* Isa. xxv. 9.

OF THE LORD APPROACHETH in the Valley of decision? May the Spirit of the Lord guide and bless us in these enquiries!

I. THE VALLEY OF DECISION, where is it spread forth? Even in his primary meaning, the Prophet appears not to have had any particular spot in view, but to have pictured to himself some wide-spread vale in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, in which his fancy could behold the multitudes of Israel's enemies assembled for their doom. Still less can the spot be fixed upon, on which the great events that shall close the world's history shall be enacted; enough for us to know, that the throne shall be set up, and judgment be administered, and all nations be gathered to receive their final award.

It is not difficult, however, to perceive the suitableness of the name by which the spot is designated, "The Valley of decision."

1. For there, in the first place, shall be decided *the great questions by which the world has been divided*, and the judgment given between the two great principles that have actuated mankind. We wait not indeed the coming of that awful day to receive the rule by which this momentous decision shall be given. The Word that has been spoken, the Word which prophets and apostles have proclaimed, the Word which

the Lord Jesus has Himself set forth, that is the Word which even now decides the strife, and according to which at the great day, the solemn judgment shall be pronounced.* Yet, though the same guide is in all our hands, the same test for the trial of our principles within reach of all; is it not sad to think how widely different are the rules of conduct which men pretend to draw from the same source? He whose heart is in the world, whose principles are earthly, and whose conversation carnal, yet professes to reverence the Word of God, and to take it for his teacher and his guide, and deems he has its authority for pronouncing them "righteous over-much," who would renounce the world, and devote themselves wholly unto God. He whose whole efforts in the matter of salvation tend to the establishment of his own righteousness, and whose principles reduce Christ to the mere make-weight in the scale of his claims upon the favor and the love of God, yet flatters himself he has the authority of God's Word for seeking to be justified by his obedience to the law, and for condemning those of breaking down the barriers of virtue, who announce justification freely, of mere grace, to even the vilest sinners that come by faith to Christ. And he, on the other hand, who knowing his own vileness, has

* John xii. 48.

renounced all hope in himself, and cast himself in all his wretchedness upon God's mercy in Christ Jesus, trusting only to His righteousness, pleading only His finished work; he who, recognising the Lord's claims upon his love, desires to renounce the world with its vain toys, and to crucify the affections of the flesh; he, too, appeals for the soundness of his principles, and the propriety of his walk, to the same Word of the Lord Jesus Christ. Can both be right? Not unless light and darkness can be reconciled. Who shall decide the point between them? The day of the Lord is near, and multitudes await His judgment in the Valley of decision. Oh! happy they, whose consciences bear them witness that they have truly, earnestly, prayerfully, made the Lord's Word their guide; derived from it their principles, based upon it their hopes, drawn from it their consolations, and guided by it their walk.

2. For there, in the second place, shall be decided according to its judgment, *the everlasting fate of all that shall be gathered there*. Before the decision of that great day is pronounced, seldom doth the Lord interpose by any visible tokens to declare who are His people, and who are not. At present, this is a matter of faith, and not of sight. So far from the true followers of the Lord being marked out by outward tokens

of prosperity from the careless and ungodly world, the prosperity in which the wicked have been seen to flourish, has often proved a trial to the faith of his afflicted people.* But in the Valley of decision shall be pronounced the inevitable and eternal doom of all that shall there be assembled. No longer shall ungodliness flourish; no longer shall vice rest in impunity; no longer shall self-righteousness fold itself in its narrow cloak, and the haughty look of pride disdain the lowly and the poor. No longer shall the meek be overborne; no longer shall the godly weep over the prevalence of sin against them; no longer shall the cast-down penitent mourn, nor the sorrowing believer shrink from the trials to which his faith has been exposed. Beyond the Valley of decision, there stretches on one side a deep, a fathomless abyss of woe; there rises on the other a scene of inconceivable and boundless joy. The one receives into its awful gulph the ungodly, the impenitent, the unbelieving; the other welcomes to its glorious plains, the faithful followers of Jesus, and thenceforth there shall be no change. The wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.†"

II. WHO ARE THEY THAT SHALL BE GATHERED

* Ps. lxxiii.

† Matt. xxv. 46.

IN THE VALLEY OF DECISION? Multitudes, multitudes crowded upon the Prophet's view; multitudes, multitudes indeed! The millions that from the first dawn of Eden, down to the last glimmer of the failing sun shall have ever opened their eyes upon this world of sin, shall be assembled in the spot where the last doom shall be pronounced. "I saw," saith the prophet, with whose apocalyptic vision the records of inspiration close, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them."* Multitudes, multitudes indeed! Yet it is not alone, because there shall be such a crowd, that our interest is awakened in that mighty gathering. We may have seen and mingled with some throngs on earth, and gazed in wonder upon the moving sea of living heads; but it is not because of the far vaster number, that such crowds as these sink into insignificance beside the multitudes that shall be gathered in the Valley of decision. It is that in that great assemblage we shall all bear a part. You, my

* Rev. xx. 12, 13.

beloved, and I shall be there among the multitudes that throng the Valley of decision. All that have occupied these seats before you, and all that shall ever listen within these walls to the Word of the living God; ye that now hear the solemn announcement of the decisive day; all that have been already summoned from their seats around the family hearth; all that now claim your parental, your filial, your fraternal love; all whom your counsel hath warned to flee from the wrath to come; all whom your example or advice may have led to paths of ungodliness and sin; all, all shall be there. Oh! solemn gathering indeed! Multitudes, multitudes shall be there, in the Valley of decision. Beloved, where shall be your place, when that decision shall be given?

III. The day of the Lord draws nigh in the valley of decision. How is it that this day of the Lord draws nigh?

1. This day may be said to draw nigh to all, because *there is but a step between us and death*; and after death shall come the judgment. Centuries may pass, as centuries have passed, between the death of any of our race, and the solemn hour when they shall stand in the vast Valley of decision; but as far as any power of changing the condition in which death hath overtaken them

is concerned, it is as though the soul had but passed from the chamber of dissolution to the scene of judgment. Thousands, alas! have lain down and perished in their sins; and in their sins, with all their guilt upon their heads, shall they awake to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. No place for penitence, no ground for prayer, no offers of salvation shall be found in the grave whither thou goest. Thousands, it may be hoped, have commended their souls by faith into the Redeemer's hands, and after all their trials and temptations, have fallen asleep in Him; and in Him shall they awake, and clad in His righteousness go forth to meet Him at the first notes of His approach. No tempting world, no sinful flesh, no subtle foe shall have assailed them in the grave; and as they lie down to sleep, so shall they wake, in Jesus, on the great day of His appearing. Thus, then, is the day of the Lord at hand to every one of us; for which of us, dying fellow-sinners, shall pronounce, whether our next waking shall not be in Eternity?

2. Yet, again, the day of the Lord draws nigh; for who shall say how speedily *the cry may burst upon our ears, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!"* From the time of the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and the announcement which then was made to His up-gazing disciples that

He should "so come again," hath the attention of His Church with more or less intensity been directed to the signs of His promised coming. So long a time, as man computes it, has passed by since the announcement of His intended return, that there are scoffers ready to reply to all such messages as that the text conveys, "Where is the promise of His coming?"* Yet, though the Lord, in His long-suffering, puts off the time of His return till all His redeemed be gathered into His fold, so soon as He shall have accomplished the number of His elect, He shall hasten His kingdom. And who shall say how many yet remain to make up the number of His people? Who, of the careless and ungodly world, that makes light of these announcements, hath any promise that the coming of the Lord shall be delayed until he shall have taken his fill of sin, and become ready to give up the refuse of his life to God? Who, among the lukewarm and the wavering, the halters between two opinions, can venture on the hope that no startling symptoms of the day of God shall break in upon his indecision, and hurry him, ere yet his mind has been made up, to meet the coming Judge? "Behold," beloved, "He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds

* 2 Pet. iii. 4.

of the earth shall wail because of Him."* Who but the single-hearted follower of Jesus can hail this announcement with the joyful exclamation, "Even so! Amen!"

Dearly beloved! Are there not some of you, who instead of taking for your guide and counsellor, now, that Word which shall judge you at the last great day, are content to fall in with the opinion of the world, to be guided by the maxims of the multitude, and to walk in the broad road which is beaten by the footsteps of its many travellers? There are multitudes, remember, in the Valley of decision; and their doom shall be determined, not by the numbers that have followed in any path, but by the principles on which they have lived. It may be feared the multitudes will be found at last to have been the enemies of God; to have been those that have walked after the carnal mind; to have been those that would not have Jesus to reign over them. And what comfort will it give you, beloved, at the last, to reflect that in all your sins, the multitude has been with you, in all your carelessness and ungodliness ye have been following the current of the world? Multitudes cannot save you in the day of the Lord; multitudes cannot alleviate your anguish, should you fall beneath the curse of the coming Judge.

* Rev. i. 7.

Oh! then, cast off this bondage of the world; dare to be singular, if to bear the yoke of Christ expose you to this rebuke: for "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."*

Beloved, are there not those of you, who yet are halting between two opinions; who are convinced there is no peace in ways of worldliness, and assured that there is happiness only in Christ Jesus, and yet are waiting in an undecided state between the world and Christ? How long thus halt ye, fellow-sinners? Will ye wait till the day of the Lord hastens you to the Valley of decision? That will be no time, remember, to make *your* decision between Christ and the world; it will be the day of the Lord's decision upon the multitudes that shall be gathered before Him. There have been those who were "not far from the kingdom of God," of whom we hear not that they ever entered it. There have been those that have trembled under their convictions of sin, of whom we find not that they ever brought their sins to Jesus and washed them out in His blood. Let their case warn you, beloved, to flee at once "for refuge to the hope set before you" in the Gospel; for the day of the Lord is near in the Valley of decision!

* Matt. vii. 14.

Dearly beloved in the Lord, are there not those among you whose hope is in the Lord Jesus, whose sole trust is in His word? How quickening, how elevating, how animating a motive to watchfulness and faithfulness and zeal is proposed to you by the announcement, that the day of the Lord is near! Whatever terrors may surround the coming of that day to those that know not Jesus, to you who look for Him and love His appearing, it should be a theme of constant thankfulness and joyous expectation. The day of the Lord is near, the day in which "He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe."* Oh! see that ye now have your conversation "in heaven, from whence also ye look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,"† that so ye may be meet, whenever He shall come, to be transferred from the expectant to the glorious Church. If truly ye are looking for these things, ye will "be diligent that ye may find of Him in peace, without spot and blameless;‡ and show by all holy conversation and godliness that, though your pilgrimage is here, your home is with the Lord. May "the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ!"§

* 2 Thess. i. 10.

† Phil. iii. 20.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

§ 2 Thess. iii. 5.

SERMON XXV.

HOW OLD ART THOU?

GENESIS XLVII. 8, 9.

And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my life are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage.

THE patriarch Jacob, when now advanced in years, is sent for by his son Joseph, whom he had long mourned as dead, and invited to come and end his days in the comfort which he could promise him in the land of Egypt. A stranger, as the patriarch had long confessed himself to be, and a pilgrim upon the earth, he quickly strikes his tent which he had pitched in the land of Canaan, and sets out with all his family to go

and greet once more his long-lost son. No sooner had he arrived in Egypt, and poured out the overflowings of his long pent-up affections upon the neck of his beloved, than Joseph, anxious for his comfortable settlement in the land, brings him in before Pharaoh, and presents him at his throne. The monarch is surrounded by the pomp and state that became the sovereign of the greatest kingdom then upon the earth, but the aged pilgrim quails not before all the splendour, that might have dazzled one less accustomed to estimate at their true value the gaudy toys of earth. Nay, conscious that as a subject of the King of kings, and as a steward of the mysteries of His grace, he had more to give than to receive, in the simplicity of his heart he pours forth an old man's blessing upon the head of him in whose dominions the long-lost son of his old age had found a shelter and a home. Struck by the venerable aspect of the good old man, yet wondering at the energy and vigor which sustained his frame and gave such life to his address, the monarch asks the patriarch of his age, "How old art thou?" And how can such a question be entertained, without calling up before the memory's glance a glimpse, at least, of the chequered scene of trial and of joy, of suffering and of peace, of sin and of forgiveness, of despondency and of hope, through

which his life had passed. "The days of the years of my pilgrimage," he replies, "are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers."

There let us leave the patriarch again invoking blessings upon the head of Pharaoh, in whom he not only saw the sovereign beneath whose sway the providence of God had now cast his lot, but whom he regarded also as the saviour and restorer of his long-lost son; there let us leave him for awhile, and think of the interview with a greater King, into which we, the lowliest among us, are this day brought, and of the enquiry which He addresses this day to each one of us. Here are we assembled, beloved, in the presence-chamber of the King of kings; for "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;"* and "where two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He in the midst."† And as this last Sabbath of another year goes by, its fading moments take to themselves a voice, yea, He "in whom we live and move and have our being," gives them a solemn sound, and by their means addresses to each one of us the question, How old art thou? A question this, often but

* Gen. xxviii. 17.

† Matt. xviii. 20.

lightly put; a question, this, often as lightly answered; but one which, addressed as it is this day, to every ear by God Himself, and gathering an importance as it does from the fast-closing history of another year, is calculated, one would think, to call up before the view full many a recollection of misspent hours, and unprofitable days, of scenes of sorrow and of seasons of joy, of warnings of providence, and of calls of grace, which have crowded not only into the history of our past lives, but even into the record of the year now near its close. And upon whom can this question be pressed, and not call forth something at least of the patriarch's reply? How many soever may have been the days of the years of your pilgrimage, have not the days of the years of your lives been few and evil; have they not come far short, not in number only, but in profitableness, in spirituality, in blessedness, of the days of those fathers in Israel, who "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth?" *

We cannot suppose the patriarch in the text to be indulging in language of repining and complaint; but must listen to him as giving expression to the estimate which the teaching of the Spirit of God, and the lessons of a long experience, had led him to form of the character of

* Heb. xi. 13.

human life. Before applying, then, to ourselves the question which the dying accents of another year would urge upon our notice, let us consider Jacob's estimate of life, and pray the Lord, the Spirit of all grace, to so impress its truth upon our minds and hearts, that we may not in words alone confess that we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, but show that we realize the importance of the confession, by earnestly seeking that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." *

"Few and evil," replies the aged Jacob, "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." He spoke of course by comparison ; and viewing our days by the same light, who may not well exclaim, Few and evil, alas ! have my days been ?

I. 1. ARE NOT MY DAYS FEW ? may the most aged among us well enquire, *when looking back* upon the longest life that is allotted as the period of our sojourn here. How short the longest day that is now drawing to its close ! It may be that as life passed on, there was much to make its passage seem painfully tedious. It may be, that laid upon a bed of anguish, we have been "made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights have been appointed to us ;" that in

* Heb. xi. 10.

the morning we have said, Would God it were even; and at even we have said, Would God it were morning; and we have been "full of tossings to and fro, until the dawning of the day." * It may be that in some hour of eager anticipation, when we were looking out for the arrival of some promised pleasure, or fondly watching for the coming of some cherished dear one, the moments seem to lag on leaden wings, and the heart hath well-nigh sickened under the pressure of hope long deferred. But how brief will now appear the period thus marked in days gone by, by hopes or fears, by joys or sufferings. Where is the year now near its close? Whither are its moments fled? Where are its hours laid up? Ah! surely the record of them is on high, and when the books are opened, the memory of them shall be found faithfully written there; yet what a moment are they now in our remembrance; how much quicker than the flight of the weaver's shuttle, or the speed of the post that hasteth by, has been the passage of the year now sounding its dying knell! Oh, that men were wise; that they would regard the pleasures of the passing moment as they shall estimate them when they come to look back upon their flight; and who is there that would be willing to barter eternal joys, for the momentary pleasure which

* Job vii. 3, 4.

scarce even leaves a trace upon memory's dark waste?

2. Are not my days few? may the longest lived among us well enquire, *when looking forward* to that Eternity which is before him. What is Eternity? The lifetime of the Lord. For "from everlasting to everlasting He is God."* "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."† And so long as He shall continue the same unchanging God, so long shall the souls which He has gifted with His own immutability exist amid the boundless glories of His presence, or suffer the awful vengeance of His endless wrath. Compared with that period of boundless happiness or endless woe, what is the moment of our being here; what are the centuries which were summed up in the lives of those that were before the flood; still less, the threescore years and ten, or at most the fourscore years, that now form the limit of man's brief career? There stands upon our church's walls the marble record of *one* aged man, who full of honors and of years went

* Ps. xc. 2.

† Ps. cii. ; Heb. i. 10—12.

down into a peaceful sleep, just as a century had closed over his head. How many of us have gazed upon his hoary locks, and followed with wondering eye his firm elastic step, long after he had passed the Psalmist's bound, and thought what a long, long time must pass ere we should come near unto the number of his years! Yet what must have seemed to him upon his dying bed, as in the simplicity of a little child he clung to Jesus as his only hope, the length of days he then looked back upon? Yea, what now seems to us, since the cold grave has hidden him from our view, the century of his existence, compared with the centuries yet stretching out before us, with the ages upon ages yet in store, ere yet the lifetime of our souls will have passed the stage even of its infancy! Few, indeed, are the days of the years of our pilgrimage; few, even, when compared with the amount of days to which the first fathers of our race attained; and Oh! how few when compared with that endless limitless Eternity, which stretches out its changeless sea before us. Oh! that men would but weigh against the things of time the momentous interests of that endless scene! Could they, then, set so much store by the trifles of the passing hour, and go on careless, or at least uncertain, of their portion in the vast Eternity that cometh?

3. Are not my days few? may the most aged

well exclaim, *when compared with the vast, the amazing importance of the work that is to be done in them.* "I must work the works of Him that sent me," saith the blessed Jesus, "while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work."* And is there not to every man an appointed time; and to every season its proper work; is not man's business a preparation for Eternity; and is not the time short in which that preparation may be made? Alas! how little do men seem to estimate the importance of time by a reference to the bearing which everything now said or done shall have upon our eternal condition! The heir of large estates, or lordly rank, is educated with a view to the station he shall hold, and the wealth that shall be placed at his disposal: yet, how often does he who professes to believe himself a child of God and an heir of heaven live in utter disregard of the expectations thus implied! Nay, who could engage with any prospect of success in any of the varied businesses of life, without having served his time to acquire a knowledge of its elements, and applied himself diligently and painfully to the attainment of its mysteries? And yet, how often do men speak of sharing the employments of heaven, who look forward to the few troubled moments of a sick and dying bed,

* John ix. 4.

as quite enough for their attainment of the knowledge of that Infinite and Eternal God with whom they have to do ; for an acquaintance with that meek, yet gracious Jesus, through whom alone they can be saved ; for the subduing of every sinful passion and propensity and habit, which they know is inconsistent with the purity of heaven ; for the attainment of that holiness of mind and heart and conduct, without which no man shall see the Lord ! The heir of heaven is placed here to be at school, that he may learn the dispositions, and acquire the habits which may fit him for the company of the saints above ; he is here at his apprenticeship, as it were, that he may, under the teaching of the Lord the Spirit, become meet to enter, when his time is up, on the occupations of the blessed in heaven. He has much to unlearn of the evil teachings of his corrupt and carnal heart ; he has much to learn concerning God and Christ, concerning the way of salvation and the path of godliness ; he has much to undo connected with the state of his unregeneracy ; he has much to do to glorify God, to show His love for the Saviour ; to become like unto the image of his holiness, and meet for His glorious appearing. Undoubtedly the salvation of the sinner is all of grace ; yet that same " grace of God, which bringeth salvation," teaches, also, " that denying ungodliness

and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world.”* Here is work enough for the longest life, yet how many think that they can crowd it all into the brief peradventure of a dying hour! Oh! that men would but view aright the momentous nature of the work that is set before them! Surely, they would feel that the days allotted them are too few to waste in sin, or to spend in the vanities of earth!

II. AND FEW AS OUR DAYS ARE, THEY ARE EVIL DAYS TOO. Jacob said not this in a spirit of unmeaning complaint, or of ungodly murmuring at the trials which had befallen him; but in a true estimate of the vanity of life: and who is there that rightly regards his position here, that must not admit the call upon him “to redeem the time, because the days” of his life “are evil.”†

1. Are not the days of our life evil, *because of the cares and trials which surround us here?* “Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”‡ Constantly as men try to drown the remembrance of this unpleasant truth in the noise and vanity of the world; constantly

* Titus ii. 11, 12. † Eph. v. 16. ‡ Job. v. 6, 7.

as men come forth from the pressure of affliction as careless, as worldly, as unconcerned as ever; still are there very few who have not, at some time, found by experience, what the word of truth had continually urged upon them, that this life is a state of trouble and anxiety and care, of suffering, of bereavement, of death. And are not these things evil: are they not to him, even, who receives them as the dispensation of the Lord, and seeks His grace to sanctify them to the soul, not joyous but grievous things, afflictions, calamities, evils? Oh! happy they who so regard the evils of the present life, as to make them an occasion for more diligently seeking their true happiness in God. Happy they who so feel the pressure of the evil of these days, as to be drawn for all their comfort and their joy to Him who has redeemed them from the evil, and opened to them an inheritance of glory! Beloved, how many of us can look back upon the year now near its close, and trace the evil days of trouble, bereavement, suffering, or distress! Oh! can we in looking back upon them see that good has been brought out of the evil; that the sting of calamity has been withdrawn by our having an interest in the love of Christ; that our trials have been turned into blessings, by advancing us, under the Lord's grace, in submission to our Father's will, and

producing in us those "fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God?"* Beloved, in the view of this closing year, I would put these questions to myself as well as to all of you. May the Lord give us grace so to answer them now, as we shall wish to in the day when we must give in our account!

2. And are not the days of the years of our life evil, *when we consider how much sin there is defiling our every thought, polluting our every action and our every word?* Alas! there are too many whose lives in this respect are one unmingled evil. They are yet the bondslaves of the world; yet the slaves of their own evil hearts; yet the willing servants of the Devil; and so, of course, the enemies of God. It may be they are not flagrant sinners; it may be, even, that, measured by the world's scale, they are good enough: but they are yet unconverted, yet ignorant of Christ, yet alienated from God; and their lives in His sight are nought but evil. Mercies have appealed to them, but have not drawn them; afflictions have pressed upon them, but have not brought them to the Lord; the word of the Lord's grace has called to them, but they have refused to return. Surely, the days of an unconverted man are evil. They may not be marked by much calamity or

* Phil. i. 11.

distress : they may be free from much of what the world deems evil : but they are evil, because they are spent in enmity to God ; they are evil, because they are spent under the curse of the Lord ; they are evil, because, unless their course is changed, their sure progress is to the endless evils of a world of woe. Oh ! that men would so consider this, that they would flee in time, for refuge from the wrath to come !

Yet even the favored Israel could feel that, in this respect, his days were evil. And what child of the true Israel can there be, that can look back even upon a closing year, even upon a closing day, and not feel that, by reason of the defilement of sin, it has been full of evil ? How many mercies have appealed to him too, and left his heart still cold and ungrateful ; how many messages of grace have sounded upon his ear, and yet left him worldly, inconsistent, and unfit for heaven ; how many evil tempers remain yet unsubdued ; how many sinful imaginations have mingled with his sacrifices to God ; how many unworthy motives have prompted him even in his charities ; how much of self-seeking has there been in his conduct, even when he was professing to follow Christ ! What cold and formal things have his prayers too often been ; what a heartless and unmeaning offering too frequently the ascription of his praise ; how

little delight has he found in the study of God's Word; what a weariness has the Sabbath often been to him, or how many of its sacred hours have been wasted on frivolous conversation or trifled away in listlessness and sloth; how many opportunities has he lost for doing good to those around him; how often has he seemed well-nigh ashamed of Christ, in his intercourse with those that knew Him not; how frequently has he given occasion to the enemies of the cross to sneer and place a stumbling-block in the way of his brethren by his inconsistencies, and shortcomings, and transgressions! Oh! who can look back upon a life thus marked by continual mercies on God's part, and ingratitude and carelessness upon his; who can look back upon the mass of evil which even one short year has accumulated upon his soul, and not feel that his days indeed are evil, so evil that there is not one moment of them that has not been stained by sin, so evil that his very best and holiest hours, his moments even of prayer and praise, need washing in the blood of Jesus, lest they prove his ruin? Assuredly, so long as man continues in this polluted tabernacle of the flesh, so long are the days of his pilgrimage evil. Oh! happy they who, washed in the blood of Jesus and sanctified by His Spirit, have a good hope, that "when their earthly house of this tabernacle shall

be dissolved, they have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."*

Since, then, we see the patriarch's estimate of life was so correct, since so few and so evil are the days of the years of our pilgrimage through this world of care, let me engage you, beloved, to weigh by this standard the importance of a plain and common question, "How old art thou?" It is no question now, beloved, of idle curiosity; it is one which the Lord himself seems this day to address to you, by the last accents of another year. Let me press it upon your attention, and pray God to apply it in seriousness to your hearts.

How old art thou, my younger friend? enquires the closing year of you, beloved, who are yet *in the morning of your days*. Some ten, some fifteen, some twenty, and some five-and-twenty years have passed over your heads, and have you yet begun to live, or must the closing year be added to the pile of wasted days, that shall cry out against you when He who has bidden you "occupy till He comes" shall call you to account? Short as your life has yet been, beloved, it has been too long to have been spent in sin, and under the wrath of God. Few as your days have been, they are too many to

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

have been thrown away in vanity, in pleasure, in the world. And are ye so old as this, and have yet scarce begun to remember that ye have a soul to be saved ; so old as this, and have not yet even begun the great work for which the Lord sent you here ; so old as this, and yet trying to put off the hour when ye will fulfil the pledges of your baptism, and take up your cross and follow Christ ? What warrant does the closing year afford you for the confidence that there is yet time enough ? One marble record has a century inscribed : go to the place where sleep the silent dead, and ask, for this one, how many are there which recount the blight of youth, the sinking of the young and gay into an early tomb. And are ye not old enough to die ? And if so, Oh, are ye not old enough to live ? Not old enough yet to heed the call of God, when He bids you seek His face and live : not old enough to listen to the gracious voice of Him who stands at the door and knocks, and pleads to be let in that He may bless you : not old enough to have found out the vanity of earthly joys, and to see that there is no true happiness but in the love of God ! Another year at least has now been nearly added to your store : Oh, heed its dying voice, and begin, if ye have not yet begun, to live.

2. How old art thou, my friend ? enquires the

closing year, of you, beloved, who are now *in the full vigor of your days*, in the very prime of healthfulness and life? Some thirty, some forty, or some fifty years have passed; another is even now on the wing, bearing its record to the remembrance book; and what account does it convey of you to Him, before whom its testimony shall be brought forth? Still halting, beloved, between two opinions; still striving to serve God and mammon; still aiming after a portion in this life, and hoping that ye may have an inheritance in heaven too? Oh! surely, beloved, the voice of the departing year, no less than the voice of God Himself, is calculated to convince you, that such a hope as this is vanity and vexation of spirit. There have been mercies poured around many of you, to lure you to the Lord; and have they appealed to you in vain? there have been trials sent in love to many among you; and have they left you as deep in the world's vanities as ever? Ye are older in days; are ye older in iniquity? Ye are nearer to eternity; are ye no more fit for its employments than ye were a year ago? Beloved, there is a great, a momentous work before you; and has another year passed by, and left you still too busy to attend to it; still too much immersed in pleasure to have time for its concerns? Oh! heed the voice of the departing year, ere yet it

cease to sound : seize on its few remaining moments, ere they are gone for ever ; and charge them not with mere intentions of doing better, but give them this record for the Lord—The time passed of my life shall suffice me to have lived in the world and sin ; here, Lord, I give myself to thee, Oh, make me thine for ever.

3. How old art thou, my aged friend ? enquires the departing year of you, beloved, upon whose heads *some threescore years or threescore years and ten have left their mark ?* Have not the evil days indeed drawn nigh to you, in which ye begin to say, I have no pleasure in them ?* And have those days found you sheltered in Christ, devoted to His service, living to His glory ? Surely, beloved, the increased rapidity with which as ye advance in age each succeeding year takes to itself wings and flies away, gives to its parting notes the peculiar solemnity of even a voice from the dead. How old are you ? it says ; and are ye as old in grace as ye are in years ? or, have ye not even yet been born again, and become babes in the kingdom of grace ? Oh ! surely, beloved, if time be precious, if each moment be important to us all, it is so peculiarly to you, whose days must be near to their close. Do ye, on looking back upon a long life, feel the patriarch's confession, " Few and evil have the days

* Eccles. xii. 1.

of the years of my life been." Oh! have ye as good a hope as he, that when your pilgrimage is over, and your tent struck, ye have a house in the bosom of your God, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?"

Beloved, the sun of the last Sabbath of the year is set. The Lord grant that should our next Sabbath be in the spring time of the Eternal Year, we may sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in our Father's kingdom!

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